

THE GOLDEN BOUGH

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The figure remained as before, staring past the lantern at the solitary oak. [PAGE 4](#)

The
GOLDEN BOUGH

BY

GEORGE GIBBS

AUTHOR OF "THE SECRET WITNESS," "PARADISE GARDEN,"
"THE YELLOW DOVE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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TO

DR. JOHN BACH McMASTER

Your Muse, a-weary with the stress

Of putting facts in careful dress,
Has doffed her dignity and made
Of History a masquerade.
She prays you, sir, to follow me
Into the Realm of Fantasy
Where Clio in a cap and bells,
With blither mien, our story tells.

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THE GOLDEN BOUGH

CHAPTER I

CREPUSCULE

In the still evening air the dust hung golden for a moment and then slowly settled on tree and hedgerow; from a distance, faintly diminishing, the tinkle of sheep bells, the call of a bird, the sighing of a breeze, and then, silence.

Against the stillness, suddenly, as though pricked upon the velvety background of the summer night, a quick, sharp staccato note near at hand, a crackle as of brittle things breaking and a large thorn bush by the side of the deserted road quivered and shook as its leaves parted and a head appeared.

It was an eager, boyish head, but almost unpleasantly alert, its brows furrowing, its dark eyes peering to right and left, with a swift furtiveness that held little of assurance. A moment of quick inspection and a pair of broad shoulders emerged, followed by a body and long legs which strode into the middle of the road where the man paused a moment looking at the afterglow in the west and then set off with long steps to the south. He wore what had once been a uniform of the Légionnaire, but rough contacts and hard usage had eliminated all distinguishing marks, and a coating of dust and stain had further disguised him. It seemed as though Nature, conspiring as it does against the enemies of its wild people, had given this man its protective coloring, that he might elude those who sought him. To carry the analogy further he was shaggy, unkempt, dusty and lean, like a brown bear sniffing the breeze after a long period of hibernation.

The stride was rapid but it was cautious too and once at a fancied shadow in the road ahead of him, the soldier darted into the bushes and crouched listening. Fear had made him cautious, but his necessity knew no law, so he rose at last, went onward more rapidly into the gathering dusk, aware that the end of his pilgrimage was near at hand--there just beyond the hills before him in the free republic of the Swiss.

As he neared the lights of the village, his pace grew slower, and leaving the road he turned into a meadow to his right in the direction of a grove of trees which seemed to promise a temporary refuge while he planned a raid upon some nearby larder or hen-roost. But contrary to his expectations, when he reached the shadows of the trees, he found his way impeded by a high stone wall, which thrust suddenly upon him out of the darkness. A wall! A monastery? Or a barracks perhaps, full of the hated gray uniforms guarding the frontier! He paused a moment, deliberating, but conscious of more than a mild curiosity as to the purpose of this walled enclosure, high up on this mountain side which seemed so peaceful and so free from the horrors he had left back there in the levels below. Only yesterday, down the valley he had seen them--the gray uniforms--and here too, at any moment...

He grinned at the wall. He was weary of flight. A wall. A garden within--a monastery most likely ... sanctuary.... At any rate he could go no further without food. This place would do as well as another. If there were monks within there would also be a kitchen and with such a wall, a larder unguarded. Moving to the right he found a tree the lower branches of which extended over the coping of the wall. At the foot of the tree he paused again, looking upward curiously, for upon the leaves of the tree he saw the reflection of yellow lights which seemed to be moving within the enclosure. Climbing noiselessly he drew himself to the level of the coping of the wall, and peered over. Through the foliage of his tree he could distinguish nothing clearly but he was aware of a lantern and a figure which moved slowly in an open space just beyond the thicket below him. It seemed that the figure wore a hood upon its head, and a gown. A monastery, of course--and this a monk, the gardener perhaps upon a lonely vigil of penance and meditation.

In any event the fugitive was now in no immediate danger from his pursuers, so he crawled out along a heavy branch of the tree which extended over the garden and noiselessly lowered himself to the top of the wall.

Here he hung in a moment of indecision, preparing an avenue of escape should his venture prove hazardous, and then peering again toward the dark habit of the holy man, now in silhouette against the light, he lowered himself by his hands and dropped to the ground. Danger had made him skillful, but he was aware of the thud of his heavy boots in the soft loam and crouched cautiously behind the thicket, ready for the slightest movement of alarm in the figure by the lantern. After a moment in which he reassured himself that the sound of his fall had not awakened the watcher from his reverie he crawled forward until he reached the furthestmost bush where he paused again, still in hiding and peered across the small stretch of lawn toward the light.

There was a raised daïs or platform of earth, approached from two sides by steps of stone. There were two stone benches above, and upon one of them,

leaning forward toward a small oak tree in the center of the guarded space, sat the dark figure which had carried the lantern. The eyes of the Légionnaire, now grown accustomed to the glow of the light, made sure that the figure had not moved, nor was aware of his silent and furtive approach. Two plans of action suggested themselves, one to move behind the foliage to the right and intercept the monk with the lantern should he attempt to flee toward the lights of the house nearby, the other to risk all in a frank statement, a plea for charity and asylum.

But as the figure remained as before, staring past the lantern at the solitary oak tree as though lost in contemplation of its branches, the Légionnaire rose, silently crossed the lawn, and reached the stone steps where the crackle of a twig beneath his foot with a sudden and startling clearness revealed his presence. He was aware of the dark figure above him springing to its feet and turning with a swift graceful motion which swept the dark cowl from its curly head and betrayed the identity of its owner--a girl--quite lovely in her fear of this tattered brown ghost that had come upon her vigils.

In an awed whisper, she spoke a few words in a language he did not understand and then was silent, watching him, frightened.

"Bitte, Fräulein," he began softly.

The sound of his voice reassured her. She turned toward him and seemed to search his figure more intently. And then in French peremptorily, "What do you want? Who are you?" she said.

At the sound of the French tongue spoken rapidly and without a trace of accent, the brown ghost smiled eagerly. "Ah, Mademoiselle is French. Then I am sure of her charity and forgiveness."

He had put one foot upon the lowest step of the daïs when she took a pace toward him and extended her cloaked arms as though barring the way, repeating her former questions.

"What are you doing here? And what do you want?" "I am hungry, Mademoiselle, also thirsty, for I have come far."

Her glance swept his figure and then, as though identifying him, returned with more assurance to his face.

"You are a soldier, a Frenchman?"

"A soldier----" He hesitated, looking down at his tattered sleeve. And then more deliberately as his gaze sought her face, "Mademoiselle is not a German. No German speaks French as you do."

"And what?"

"Merely that I am an escaped prisoner of Germany on my way to Switzerland," he smiled. "You see, I am frank with you. Something tells me that you're friendly."

"Switzerland!" she said. "Did you not know that you were already fifteen

kilometers within the Swiss border?"

"Switzerland? Here?" The mingled expression of bewilderment and surprise upon his dirty face was comical.

"Switzerland!" he gasped again.

"You must have passed the frontier in the night," added the girl. "You're quite safe now, I should say."

"Sacred name of a pipe!" he grinned. And then, with an air of apology, "Pardon, Mademoiselle. If I'd known that I'd passed the border, I shouldn't have intruded. But I was hungry, thirsty, too, and I thought that I might find meat, drink, a place to sleep in peace."

He paused, waiting for the girl to speak, but she said nothing and only stood frowning toward the lights at the other side of the garden.

"Of course, Mademoiselle, since I'm now safe from pursuit, if you wish it, I can retire by the way I came." He shrugged and turned half away when the sound of her voice halted him.

"I-I do not wish to be inhospitable," she said softly. "It is your right to ask asylum of us. But you have come, Monsieur, upon cloistered soil----"

"A convent?"

"No, not a convent," she said "But private land, dedicated to solitude, and--and----" she paused uncertainly. "You would not understand."

He waited for her to go on. But she stopped abruptly and said no more. The strangeness of her garb, the mingled frankness and reticence of her speech, which excited friendly curiosity while it repelled inquiry, gave the fugitive a new interest in the cowed figure, an interest in which even the pangs of hunger and weariness were forgotten. From the top step she towered above him, her dark robe hanging with a majestic stateliness which somehow belied the testimony of the curly reddish brown hair and the red lips which had already been perilously near a roguish smile. Something in the eager expression of the face of her guest as he looked at her made her suddenly aware of the exigencies of the occasion, for she drew the cowl about her head and came down the steps, leaving the lantern upon the stone bench beside the small tree.

"Wait here," she said quietly, "at the foot of the steps. If you will promise me not to----" She turned and looked toward the mound. "If you will remain here without moving, I'll see what can be done."

"I will promise anything, Mademoiselle."

They looked into each other's eyes a moment, smiling in a friendly way, and then she passed him and vanished within the house.

The soldier took off his cap and rubbed his head thoughtfully. "Cloistered soil----" The phrase hung in his ears. A queer place this, a queer creature this girl. To his western eyes she seemed better suited to a tennis match or a game of golf

than to this mooning by lamp light, with shadows in eyes which were only meant for joy and laughter. What was her nationality? Not French, though she spoke it like a native, not Swiss, and surely not German, something more Easternly, Oriental almost. She was a paradox, a lovely paradox indeed to eyes long starved of beauty and gentleness.

But other considerations were less important to the fugitive than the gnawing ache of his hunger and the demands of a body already taxed for many weeks to its utmost. Obeying the injunction of the girl not to move, he sank to the stone step. When she returned, she found him with his head bent forward upon his knees, already dozing; but at the light touch upon his shoulders he sprang to his feet, his club raised upon the defensive, almost oversetting the dish which carried his supper.

"Be careful," said the girl.

He stared at her in a moment of incomprehension, but the sight of the bread, meat and cheese, quickly restored him to sanity.

"I--I beg pardon," he began, "I dreamed----"

But his hands were already reaching forward toward the dish and with a smile she handed it to him.

"Sit again, eat and drink. There is milk."

He obeyed, wasting no words and she sat beside him, watching calmly while he bolted the food like a famished wolf. He finished what was on the platter and all of the milk before he spoke again. Then he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and gave a great grunt of satisfaction.

"Shall I bring you more?" she asked.

"No, no, thanks. You're very good, Mademoiselle. I didn't know I was so hungry."

"Are you sure you've had enough?"

"Oh yes."

"When was the last time that you ate?"

"The day before yesterday. I didn't dare to leave the woods, even at night."

"You've traveled far?"

"A million miles, I think. I don't know how far. They had me working on the railroad near Mannheim."

"And you escaped?"

"At night, from the pen. They shot at me, but I swam down a stream and got away. I lived on berries for a while--and potatoes, when I could steal them. I'm a living example of food conservation. It was risky work approaching the farm houses, on account of the dogs. Some of us may think Germany will go to the dogs, but I'm sure of one thing and that is that all the dogs in the world have gone to Germany. And they never sleep. I went miles out of my way to avoid the roads.

You're the first human being I've spoken to for weeks. It's quite extraordinary to be able to talk again, to have some one listen. Sometimes in the deep woods I used to talk to myself just to hear the sound of my own voice."

"I'm very sorry for you."

There was no doubting the sincerity of her tone or the gentleness in her eyes.

"Sorry? Are you? That's very wonderful. I thought that people had stopped being sorry for anything in this world."

"It's terrible to be so bitter."

He laughed. "I'm not bitter. I never felt more amiable in my life. But the world has gone mad, Mademoiselle."

"The Germans treated you badly?"

He smiled and shrugged.

"What would you have? It is war."

"It is terrible. And what will you do now that you are across the border? Will they not intern you?"

"I must find civilian clothing."

"And then?"

He laughed joyously.

"I will cross into France at the Swiss border, and rejoin my regiment. *Par-bleu!* There are some there who will think I have risen from the dead."

She was silent for a moment regarding him thoughtfully, her eyes brightening with a new interest. At first he had seemed a man of middle age, a broken man, such as passed begging along the roads of the village. And the dirt and the ragged beard that covered his face had done nothing to dispel the illusion. But she saw now how far she had been mistaken, for his laughter rippled forth from his lean muscular throat as though in pure joy at its own utterance. He was not bitter--he was merely experienced.

"You're a Frenchman, Monsieur?"

"No, Mademoiselle, an American."

"American! And you've fought long for France?"

"More than two years."

"You were living in France?"

"No, Mademoiselle, in America. But I could not stand what happened in Belgium. And so I came. It's very simple."

"But you speak French----"

"German and Italian. I've been much in Europe. I had a gift for languages. But I'm not of much account otherwise. I'm a ne'er-do-well--a black sheep." He grinned at her.

"I do look rather black now, don't I? You'd be surprised to see how much

better I look when I'm clean."

"I don't doubt it, Monsieur."

Youth called to youth. Her laugh echoed softly among the venerable trees and as she raised her chin, the cowl slipped from her head again disclosing her curly hair, a copper-colored nimbus against the glow of the lantern.

He turned a little toward her and glanced at her with more assurance, and then with a smile.

"You're just a girl, aren't you?"

She laughed again.

"What did you think I was?"

"I didn't know," he said more slowly. "You seemed something between a Shade and a Mother-Superior."

"A very inferior Mother-Superior, Monsieur," she smiled, and then with more soberness, "I don't wonder you were perplexed. Sometimes I am a little perplexed myself----"

She halted and did not resume, and so:

"I should not be inquisitive," he said, "Your hospitality gives me no further claim----"

"What is it that you wish to know?"

"Who and what you are. Is it not natural that I should like to know to whom I am indebted----"

"It doesn't matter. What I have done is little enough beside what you have suffered for poor bleeding France. At least we are allies."

"You----"

"A Russian----"

"Ah----"

"A modern Russian, Monsieur. A free spirit of the times in which we live. It is the aim of my life to do for my own country what you have done for France."

"But to fight, Mademoiselle----?"

"With subtler weapons than yours. It is to that I dedicate my life----"

She rose suddenly as though realizing that she had already said too much. She picked up the dish and bowl and took an irresolute step away from him. "I would like to ask you to stay, but----"

She paused and whispered quickly. "He comes. Say nothing. Let me tell your story. Perhaps you may remain to sleep here."

And following her glance, he saw a figure emerging from the gloom in the direction of the house, the tall figure of a man, with shoulders bent and eager eyes which, like those of a black nocturnal cat had already caught a pale reflection of

the lantern's gleams.

CHAPTER II

ENIGMA

As the man came nearer, he seemed a remarkable creature. His coat, of the kind known in the eighties as a Prince Albert, hung loosely from his lean square shoulders, to a point midway between hip and knee. His hair was dark and long and wisps of it had fallen over his broad pale forehead to which they adhered as though a tight hat-band had pressed them there. Heavy eye-brows met above a long narrow nose, which jutted down over lips turned in, thin and impalpable, to the square chin which was thrust out aggressively as he strode forward, his hands working unpleasantly at the ends of his long wrists.

"What's this, Tanya Korasov?" he asked in a sharp querulous voice.

"A hungry soldier, Kirylo Ivanitch," said the girl.

Her shining eyes glanced quickly toward the dais.

"He came----"

"Over the wall. He was much in need of rest and food----"

"Ah----" growled the other. "A soldier----"

"He goes to join his colors."

The frown on the brows of the man in the Prince Albert relaxed and he seemed to give a gasp of relief as he examined the intruder more calmly.

"The world has gone rabid with the smell of blood. Even here, all about us----" He broke off suddenly, turning to the girl. "You have fed him?"

"Yes, Kirylo. But I doubted----"

"We are not savages, Monsieur," he broke in. "You shall be made comfortable for the night. Come. Tanya, the lantern."

And he led the way across the lawn to the house, while Tanya mounted the dais for the lantern and followed them. Whatever the doubts of the girl as to the hospitality which might be accorded him, the fugitive now saw no reason to suspect the intentions of the strange gentleman in the Prince Albert coat, for as they reached the building he stood aside, indicating the lighted doorway.

"Enter, mon ami," he said. "It shall not be said that this house refuses charity or alms to any seeker after Liberty, even though he go about his quest in a manner with which we disapprove."

"Thanks, Monsieur," said the soldier gratefully.

The room which they entered was the kitchen, and the two persons who occupied it, an aged woman and a youngish man with a shock of yellow hair, paused in the act of masticating, remaining with their full mouths open and eyes staring until the young soldier had passed through the door into the main building beyond. In the brief moment of passing them, the American experienced the same sense of vague hostility as that which had first greeted him in the man Ivanitch, a querulous attitude of anxious suspicion, which for some unknown reason had now disappeared,--a look of expectancy in their eyes, or was it a veiled fear, as of some danger which might come upon them unawares? Was this the reason for the wall? And if so, why a girl in a monk's cowl for sentry?

He was too weary to analyze the return of his impressions and when the Russian reached the room beyond the kitchen, he motioned the Légionnaire to a chair while he bade the girl Tanya bring forth glasses and a jug.

"Sit a moment, Monsieur the soldier," he said suavely. "It is Chartreuse--the real Chartreuse, made years ago by the monks not many leagues from here--there is little of it left even in Switzerland. It will give you new life."

The soldier pledged his host and hostess and drank.

"You are very good," he said with real gratitude. "I came to steal and go upon my way," he smiled. "And so your kindness and that of Mademoiselle covers me with confusion."

"Ah! Necessity knows no law," said the Russian pleasantly. "You shall have a bed, a night of sleep. And your necessity shall be our pleasure."

"But my intrusion! If one lives within a wall it is doubtless to keep people out. But in helping me, Monsieur, you are helping France. And in helping France,--Russia."

"Russia!" There was a finality of despair in the tone with which Kirylo Ivanitch uttered the word. "May God grant her help--for she needs it. We pray for her--as we work for her in secret--in secret."

Ivanitch clasped his bony fingers and squeezed them until the knuckles cracked. "If it will give you courage to fight with steel and bullets, I will tell you that great things are in the air, for Russia and for all the world."

"Freedom," said the American. "I know. It is written. So much blood cannot be shed in vain."

"We labor for the same end, you and I," went on the Russian. "The same end, but with different means----" And then, with a look of quick inspection--"You join the Legion soon again?"

The gaze of the Russian quickened as for the first time he noted the soldier's uniform.

"What is your name, Monsieur?"

"Phil Rowland."

"Rowlan'?" He puzzled over the pronunciation slowly

"Rowland. I am an American."

"Ah--American!"

"My mother was Italian----"

"But American. How happens it that you are here in this uniform?"

"I'm a citizen of the world, a nomad. I like adventure. And so when the war broke out I sailed and joined the Foreign Legion."

"The Legion! A regiment of young devils. It is madness. A mad cause--to what end?"

"That France may live."

"Ah, yes." And then, suddenly, "You join the Legion soon again?"

The American would have replied, but the girl Tanya, who had stood behind his chair, broke in quickly.

"Monsieur Rowlan' is tired, Kirylo Ivanitch. Is it not better that I show him to his room? Tomorrow he will tell you--"

"Your Chartreuse has already restored me, Mademoiselle."

The Russian waved his hand and Tanya Korasov sank into a chair.

"An American! I have always wanted to go to America. One day you will learn to think over there. And then you will be able to help with the great problems of Europe. Your mother was Italian?" he asked.

Phil Rowland smiled good-naturedly at the persistence of his questioner.

"Yes, Monsieur. Of an ancient and noble family. But in America we make little of ancestry."

"Yet, it is important."

The deep gaze of the Russian, which had been fixed upon the jug upon the table, turned slowly and fastened upon the uniform of the Légionnaire, the shocking condition of which had not been visible in the dim light of the garden.

"You have fared badly, Monsieur Rowlan'. Your uniform shows hard usage."

"What would you? I was captured in it and have worn it ever since. The Boches do not trouble to send their prisoners to a tailor."

"The Boches! You were, then, a prisoner of the Germans----?"

The Russian straightened in his chair, his bony hands clasping its arms, his brows tangling suddenly.

"Until three weeks ago, yes, Monsieur."

It was not imagination that gave Phil Rowland the notion that the tone of voice of the Russian had suddenly changed again. He felt the black eyes, now almost hidden under the dark bushy brows, burning into his own. And while he could not explain the feeling of inquietude, he realized that some chance remark of his had aroused a dormant devil in his host.

"A prisoner! The Germans!" He repeated quickly. "And you come here to Nemi. Who sent you hither?"

"Why, no one, Monsieur," said the American, easily, with a smile which concealed his growing curiosity. "I do not even know just when or where I crossed the border."

"Ah. It is strange--that you should come here. Italian, too----"

Ivanitch wagged his great head quickly. The girl Tanya broke in with a short laugh.

"Monsieur Rowlan' is not the first escaping soldier who has passed through the village. You remember, last week----"

"But he went away, Tanya Korasov--he did not stay----" broke in Ivanitch excitedly.

The American rose from his chair, mystified.

"As I shall do now, Monsieur, if you will permit me----"

He took a pace toward a door which seemed to lead toward the front of the house, but the girl stood before him and faced her compatriot, who had sank again in his chair, his head deep in his shoulders.

"For shame, Kirylo Ivanitch," she said in a spirited voice. "For shame! That you should be so inhospitable! The man is dead upon his feet and you send him out into the night--to be interned perhaps tomorrow!"

"An escaping prisoner! A slave!" He rose from his chair, brushing his hair back with a wild gesture. "You were a slave, were you not--a slave to the Germans? Answer me."

Had the man suddenly gone mad? Or was the brain of the Légionnaire suffering from a delusion of its own weariness? What was the meaning of this extraordinary conversation? What the significance of this sudden and strange hostility? And what difference could it make to this man Ivanitch whether he, Rowland, had been a slave or not?

The American shrugged and smiled again, more patiently.

"A slave?" he replied. "One might call it that. I worked like a dog upon a railroad. I was chained to the man next me, and would have been shot had I attempted resistance."

The result of this innocent explanation was still more surprising.

"There!" cried the Russian, wildly exhorting the girl. "Did I not tell you so? A slave--an escaping slave--here at Nemi. Let him go, I say, or I shall not answer for the consequences."

"Of course, Monsieur----" said Rowland.

But at a sign from the girl, the American paused at the door and stood, his weariness forgotten in the curious dialogue that followed, which seemed to plunge him deeper into the mystery of this strange couple and the house of the

walled garden. The girl Tanya crossed the room swiftly and noiselessly and laid her hand upon the arm of Kirylo Ivanitch, who now paced to and fro before the fireplace, like some caged beast, his head lowered, seeming not to see but furtively watching the dusty boots of the astonished fugitive.

"It is not possible, Kirylo," she said softly. "He knows nothing. Would he not have broken IT at once? Who was to have prevented him? Not I. He is merely a boy and free from guile. Can you not see?"

"It is dangerous for him to remain," gasped the Russian.

"It is more dangerous for you to indulge these mad fancies. IT is safe yonder. Go and see for yourself. I, Tanya Korasov, will vouch for this weary fugitive. But you shall not turn a loyal ally of Russia out into the night. Tomorrow he shall go forth and you shall send him, refreshed and safely conducted to the border of France, when he will go and fight your battles and mine, with the common enemy of Humanity. Do you hear?"

He stared at her, sullenly.

"I shall conduct him nowhere. I wish him to go," he said.

But the girl stood her ground, continuing calmly:

"Tomorrow morning you shall give him a suit of civilian clothing and he will go upon his way, thanking you, Kirylo Ivanitch. That is all."

"A boy? Yes. No doubt.... But Destiny is too strong. Italian! What if----"

He paused, running his bony fingers through his long hair.

"Impossible. It cannot be," she soothed him.

"I have much to do--tomorrow or next day they are coming--the conference is momentous. If anything should----"

"Sh----! He shall be gone."

The girl turned to the American as though to atone for the strange conduct of her compatriot, and smiled graciously.

"You will forgive the whim of Monsieur Ivanitch, I am sure. He works too hard, all day, and most of the night. You would understand, if you knew his problems, his suspicions, his labors."

"I'm still willing to go, Mademoiselle, if Monsieur still desires it----" said Rowland easily.

For a moment they had been lost in each other. A gasp from the direction of the fireplace, and as they turned, Kirylo Ivanitch fled past them silently and out into the darkness of the night. The look the American sent after him gave the girl a true vision of what was passing in his mind.

"You think that he is mad," she said soberly. "It is not so. An obsession--" she paused abruptly as though the words had been stifled upon her lips and shrugged lightly. "I can tell you nothing--but on this I am resolved. You shall not be sent forth tonight or taken tomorrow when France, my country's ally, needs

you yonder."

He caught her hand and pressed it to his lips. And then, with a joyous smile:

"I shall fight the better for the memory of this hour. Whatever your mission here, Mademoiselle, God grant you success in it. And for the part of one soul which passes yours like a ship in the night, I pray that we may meet again."

"It shall be so, perhaps," she said easily, though she flushed at the warmth of his words.

"When a razor and a bath shall have made me once more a gentleman," he added with a laugh.

"Perhaps that may be tomorrow?" she returned gaily.

The roguish smile that had died still-born upon her lips, there, earlier, in the garden, came suddenly upon the sweetness of her lips and gave them new lines of loveliness, which made him glad that she had saved it for the light where he might see.

She noted the look of admiration in his dark eyes, and turned quickly away, taking up a candle from the table.

"Until tomorrow, then, Monsieur," she said decisively. "For now you shall go to bed."

"I am no longer tired."

But she was already moving toward the stairway to the upper floors.

"If you will follow me--" she said calmly, and led the way up the stairs, her soft black robe caressing her slender ankles.

A lamp set in a bracket burned dimly upon the second floor, and he followed her heavily down the high, echoing corridor. A large hall, scantily furnished, dim and mysterious with many doors to right and left, a house, it seemed, more like a hotel than a villa, and more like a monastery than either. The girl led the way and opened at last a door near the end of the corridor, entering the room and setting the candle upon a table. In the flickering light which cast its shadows upward along her face she seemed to have taken again the character of the Priestess, the Shade of the garden, with the cowl and robe of mystery. Her expression too seemed to have grown more serious, though the golden nimbus of light was again entwined about her ruddy hair.

"Good night, Monsieur Rowlan," she said gently. "Tomorrow morning you will find a change of clothing upon the chair outside the door. Sleep safely. If you fear--" she paused.

"Fear?" he asked. "Of what?"

"I forgot that you are a soldier. But when I go out, nevertheless, you shall bolt this door upon the inside." And as he turned to her in inquiry, "No. You must ask no questions, but only obey."

His smile met with no response. And so he shrugged and bowed.

"It shall be as you desire, Mademoiselle."

And without a word, she was gone.

He listened for a moment to the light tap of her footfalls down the corridor until he heard them no more, when he closed the heavy door, bolted it and sank upon the small iron bed while he tried to ponder a solution of the events of the evening.

Out of the train of vague occurrences stood clearly the wholesome friendly figure of this girl, Tanya Korasov. Her robes, her cowl, the vestments of her strange association with the fanatic Kyrlo Ivanitch, seemed only to bring her sanity, youth and kindness into stronger relief. That she was a member of some secret association of which her compatriot was the head seemed more or less obvious, but what was the personal relationship between them? The man had intellectual power and doubtless held his sway as the official director of some sort of propaganda for the freedom of Russia, but his deference to the wishes of the girl made it also evident that she too was high in his councils. His niece? His cousin? Or was their relation something nearer, something----? Impossible. The man was fifty, the girl young enough to be his daughter. A relationship purely intellectual, more deeply welded by the bonds of a cognate purpose. But what of the robes, the vigils, the daïs in the garden, the strange dialogue about the escaping slave which seemed to have so large a part in determining his own status as a guest in this house of mystery? What was IT? And what the danger suggested by the final injunction of the girl to bolt the door of his bedroom? From whom? Ivanitch? From the shock-headed youth in the kitchen who had stared at him so curiously? Or from others whom he had not seen?

He gave up the problem and slowly removed his boots and tattered clothing which he tossed with some disgust into a corner. The order of the room reproached him, and tired as he was, he cleansed himself to be worthy of the immaculate linen, then blew out the light and with a sigh of delight at the luxury of sheets, he crawled into bed and tried to relax. He had thought of this moment for weeks, and how he would sleep if he was ever again offered a bed, but now strangely enough, his muscles twitched and his eyes remained open, staring into the obscurity.

Tanya! That was a pretty name--Tatyana probably. There was a fairy princess of that name who came to him suddenly from out of the mists of childhood--a princess with a filmy veil, a diadem upon her forehead and a magic white wand which accomplished the impossible. She was pure, she was beautiful and had happened long ago, before--before his rather variegated career across two continents. This new Tanya was a part of the night, a gracious kindly shade with a ruddy diadem and a roguish smile, which set aside the symbols of her strange servitude. He smiled as he thought of her and closed his lids again, but they flew

open as though actuated by hidden springs.

He was aware of some movement in the house about him, the soft pad of footsteps in the corridor outside which went along a few paces and then seemed to pause just at his door. Then a murmur as though of voices in a low tone. Once he fancied the knob of his door was tried by a stealthy hand. So sure was he of this that he got out of bed and without striking a light, examined the bolt to reassure himself that the door was firmly fastened.

Then he smiled to himself and went noiselessly back to bed. The soldier Rowland was merely aware of a devouring curiosity. But presently the demands of his weary muscles vanquished even this, and he slept.

He awoke suddenly, as he had often done in the dugouts at the warning of the sentry, and started upright in bed, listening. The softness of the sheets perplexed him, and it was a moment before he realized where he was. No sound but the murmur of insects outside the house and the sighing of a breeze. What had awakened him? Noiselessly he got up and tried the bolt of the door. It was fastened. Then he stole cautiously to the window, and peered down into the garden.

By the star-light, he could dimly see the lawn, the path and the daïs beyond where he had first seen Tanya. His eyes, trained like a cat's to the darkness, during his weeks of night traveling, pierced slowly into every part of the obscurity beneath the trees. Something was moving there near the mound of earth, a dark figure with a cowed head and a robe. The figure moved forward slowly a few steps, peering from right to left and then darted suddenly around to the other side of the daïs, but always eager and watchful, near the mound of earth. Rowland seemed to identify the figure by its broad bent shoulders and shuffling walk as Kirylo Ivanitch. As the American watched, he saw the Russian turn and walk slowly toward the house. Beneath Rowland's window the Russian stopped with folded arms and looked upward. From beneath the black cowl the American seemed to feel the blazing eyes of Ivanitch upon his, but he knew that in his place of concealment he could not be seen and so he did not move. And presently, the man turned swiftly and went back to the mound of earth to resume his strange sentry duty.

Philip Rowland shrugged as he turned away from the window and went back to bed, grinning to himself.

"Batty," he muttered to himself. "Completely batty."

CHAPTER III

MYSTERY

Philip Rowland slept heavily until broad daylight when the sun pierced his window and cast a cheerful golden lozenge upon the white-washed wall above his iron bed. He stretched his arms luxuriously and as the events of the previous night came to him, rose and looked out of the window. A clamor of birds among the gilded tree-tops, long violet shadows along the dewy garden, and there on a bench upon the mound of earth which had perplexed him last night, a solitary black figure, quiescent but watchful. It was not Ivanitch or Tanya, but one that he had not seen before, for the figure wore no cowl and the head was clearly visible. So they had kept watch all night! The American laughed outright. The things that had seemed weird and even uncanny in the darkness were by the broad light of day little short of arrant nonsense. Mediæval flummery such as this in the fair sunlight of the summer morning! It was amateurish, sophomoric, and hardly worthy of the psychos of the intellectual mystic in the Prince Albert coat. Tanya, too--a dealer in magic and spells? He smiled to himself as he turned from the window. He knew women--they had a talent for the dramatic. But he wouldn't acknowledge even to himself that he was disappointed in Tanya. He wanted to keep last night's vision of her as a thing apart. She was his Goddess of Liberty. Whatever her share in this mumbo-jumbo business, she herself was never to be tawdry.

He was softly whistling "Tipperary" as he unbolted his door and peered out into the silent corridor. There upon a chair beside his door was the clothing that Tanya had promised him, a suit of dark clothes--not a Prince Albert, he was joyed to discover--underwear, a shirt and--blessings upon blessings--scissors and a razor! She had forgotten nothing. There is a delight in cleanliness that only the cleanly who have become filthy can ever really know. But this escaped prisoner found a secret pleasure in the fact that he was now to become Philip Rowland, gentleman, a person once known on Broadway and Fifth Avenue for the taste of his sartorial embellishments.

He bathed again, shaved and dressed in the clothing (which fitted him atrociously) and went down the stairs into the room through which he had passed last night. There was no one about and the door into the kitchen was closed, though an appetizing odor of coffee pervaded the air. He glanced at the books upon the table, a few novels, Turgenev, Dostoievsky in French, some Russian newspapers and a miscellaneous lot of German and French socialistic periodicals. Socialism--of course--the veneer that might cover a rougher grain beneath.

But the most extraordinary object in the room, one which the visitor had not noticed last night, was a piece of ancient sculpture upon a pedestal in a corner of

the room, a double-headed bust, one face young and beardless with shut lips and a steadfast gaze, the other older with wrinkled brows, a wild, anxious look in the eyes and a mouth open as though in horror. Around the neck of the double-head a garland of what seemed to be oak-leaves was carved into the stone and upon the pedestal, the inscription REX NEMORENSIS. That the sculpture was of a great antiquity was indicated by its worn surfaces and discolorations, and Rowland paused, studying it attentively, lost in speculation as to what if any connection this curious work of ancient art could have with the mystery of this house. Nemi-Ivanitch had mentioned it last night. REX NEMORENSIS--King of the Wood. But what was the symbolism of the two heads--the young man and the old, the young one, eager and fearless, the other old, anxious and terrified. Nemi!

Where had he come upon the name before? It seemed to echo to him out of the past. Nemi! A name out of a legend, written as though with fire against the darkness of a childish nightmare and then extinguished. A name of something beautiful and something unhappy, something dreadful and something fascinating--the name of a blessing or of a curse! He shrugged at last, winked cheerfully at the hideous face on the pedestal, and gave the problem up. Then, turning, he sauntered toward a door which seemed to lead to the front of the garden, but before he reached it a voice came from over his shoulder, and turning quickly, he saw the girl Tanya, standing on the stairway giving him good morning. Her black robes had been discarded and she was dressed quite simply in a white morning frock which accentuated the lines of the strong slender figure and answered some of the questions that her sober garb had denied him. She was young, resilient, full of the joys of the awakened day, and wonderfully good to look at. The two of them stood for a moment staring at each other as though they had never seen each other before, Rowland's eyes full of admiration which he made no effort to conceal.

It was Tanya who first spoke.

"You are so different, Monsieur Rowlan', that I wasn't quite sure----" she laughed. "If I hadn't known the clothes----"

"And you, Mademoiselle." He paused seeking a word. "You--are the morning."

"Did you sleep well?"

"Like the dead. I was not disturbed." He smiled significantly, but she seemed not to notice, as she crossed to the door of the kitchen and ordered the coffee. And in a moment they were sitting at a table in an adjoining room where the shock-headed man brought the urn from the kitchen and a tray upon which were eggs, butter and *petits pains*. Rowland studied the man carefully and noted a sharp look from the fellow as their glances crossed. But in a mirror opposite him he saw the man pause as he went out and turn and stare at him with so malevolent a look

that the American recalled quite vividly his impressions of the night before. He was not wanted here. Whatever the affairs of this place it was obvious that to all except the girl Tanya, Rowland was *de trop*. As he ate he found his curiosity as to the strange actions of the men of Nemi gathering impetus. They were like a lot of Boches having a morning "hate." However hospitable the girl, it was clear that they resented his presence, and from a window, even as he sat, he could see the ridiculous black figure of the third man mounting guard over the absurd tree at the other side of the garden. But Rowland grinned and drank of his coffee, sure now that the eyes of Tanya Korasov had something on all those of a Winter Garden chorus rolled into two. But they weren't bold eyes like some others he had known. They appraised him frankly but without the least timidity. She had given him her friendship last night and until he went on his way he was her guest to whom the hospitality of the house was open.

"Monsieur Ivanitch," she said after a moment, and with as he fancied a slight air of constraint, "begs that you will excuse him, as he will take his coffee upstairs."

"Of course. I hope that I haven't interfered----"

"It doesn't matter," she put in quickly. "Something happened which disturbed him. He is overworked and often distraught with nerves."

"I'm sorry."

"He is accustomed to being much alone," she added with an abstracted air.

"I won't bother him much longer. I'll be off in a moment. But I regret to go without knowing something more of you, Mademoiselle. Your kindness in spite of the hostility of Monsieur Ivanitch, your fear for my safety last night----"

"I-I merely thought that--that if you bolted your door you would be able to pass a night of rest."

Her manner was not altogether convincing. He looked at her soberly and went on softly.

"I'm not a meddler by nature, Mademoiselle," he continued, "but I do confess to a devouring curiosity. The organization to which you belong is secret. I can perhaps guess some of its purposes, but the mystery which I have met on every hand----"

"I can tell you nothing," she said, her eyes averted.

"Not even that what you do is not distasteful to you?"

She lowered her voice a note.

"I'm not unhappy," she said slowly.

"Nor contented. There is a danger in the air, a nameless danger which if it does not threaten you, menaces those about you."

"Danger!" she said quickly. "What does that matter to me, when Russia, when all Europe is bleeding to death. I fear nothing----"

"Not even an escaping slave?"

The words uttered quickly, almost at random, had a most startling effect upon her. She drew back quickly from the table and then leaned forward, whispering.

"Sh----! You knew----?" she asked.

"You came here----" she paused and was silent again.

"Was it not that phrase which so profoundly affected Monsieur Ivanitch?" he asked.

She made no reply.

He rose from the table and straightened.

"You wish me to go, Mademoiselle?" he asked.

She hesitated a moment and then with a gasp,

"Yes. You must go--at once."

He shrugged, smiled and turned away. It was too bad.

"Of course I have no right to question you. But I should like to put myself at your command for any service----"

"You can do nothing. Only go, Monsieur."

He looked at her eagerly. There was a change in her manner. She too had at last turned against him. It seemed that she had grown a shade paler, and he saw her eyes staring in a startled way as at some object behind him.

Instinctively he turned. The door into the kitchen was partly open and half through the aperture, distorted with some strange agony, was the face of Kirylo Ivanitch. In the fleeting moment before the Russian emerged it seemed to Rowland that this was the exact expression on the face of the anguished half of the double-bust in the adjoining room, the face of the older man in terror and fury. But he had to admit that in the flesh and blood it was far more convincing.

Ivanitch now thrust the door open with a bang and stood, his arms, long like an ape's, hanging to the knees of his trouser legs at which the bony fingers plucked unpleasantly.

He did not speak to Rowland, though his gaze never left his face, but he muttered something hoarsely in Russian to Tanya--an angry phrase, the tone of which sent the hot blood flying to Phil Rowland's temples. He did not know what she replied, but her voice was pitched low and had a note of contrition that still further inflamed him. Last night he had thought Ivanitch merely an eccentric zealot unnerved by too much work. Now he seemed surely mad, a maniac not far from the verge of violence.

The Russian took a pace forward toward the American who stood his ground, conscious of a rising anger at the inhospitality and a growing desire to see the thing through, whatever happened. But a glance at Tanya found her gaze fixed on him with a look so earnestly appealing, that he suppressed the hot words that had risen to his tongue.

"I am sorry, Monsieur Ivanitch," he said coolly, taking refuge in the formal French phrase, "to have so far strained the hospitality of Nemi----"

"Go then--" growled the Russian, pointing toward the door.

The voice was brutal, harsh, inhuman and challenged all that was intemperate in Rowland, aroused again the reckless venturing spirit that had sent him forth to deal with the primitive forces of evil. He leaned forward toward the distorted face, his arms akimbo, and stared the Russian in the eyes.

And then a strange thing happened. The blaze in the Russian's eyes was suddenly extinguished. It was as though a film had passed over them, leaving them pale, like a burnt out cinder. His jaw fell too, his arms flapped aimlessly a moment and then fell to his sides as he retreated through the open door into the kitchen.

"Go!" he whispered querulously, as though his voice too had been burnt out. "Go!"

As the man disappeared, Rowland relaxed and turned toward Tanya with a shrug.

"A madman!" he muttered. "You can't stay here, Mademoiselle Korasov."

"It's nothing," she said breathlessly. "When you are gone, he will recover. You must go now, Monsieur. Hurry, or harm will come----"

"To you?" eagerly.

"To you, Monsieur."

"I'm not frightened," he said with a grin.

"I know. But you must go at once. Here. This way. The gate is in the garden wall." And she opened the door and stood aside to let him pass. He took up the cap she had provided for him and paused a moment to offer her his hand.

"I thank you again, Mademoiselle."

She touched his fingers lightly but he caught her own and held them a moment.

"Good-by," he said gently.

"God bless and preserve you, Monsieur Rowlan!", she whispered.

He stepped out into the garden, the girl just behind him indicating the gate in the wall about fifty yards distant, the only exit from the enclosure. But as he emerged from the shadow of the house and turned up the path toward the gate a loud whistle sounded from the direction of the daïs, where the monkish figure that had been on guard rose suddenly, like a raven interrupted at a meal, flapping its wings and screaming discordantly. To his left in the wall of the house, doors flew open noisily and men emerged, Ivanitch, the shock-headed man, and another. They did not come toward Rowland but moved abreast of him as he went up the garden path, silent, watchful, keeping pace with him, like men in open order advancing in skirmish-line, Ivanitch nearest him, not more than three

paces distant, Ivanitch the fantastic, Ivanitch the impossible. Rowland eyed him curiously. His face was moist with perspiration and the wisp of black hair was glued to his white forehead. His eyes no longer blazed for they were invisible under the dark thatch of his bent brows, but his figure and gait gave every token of the strange terror that had suddenly swept over him in the middle of their conversation last night.

Rowland grinned at him cheerfully. They dreaded him, these four men, dreaded and feared him, but Ivanitch dreaded and feared him most. The situation was comic. Rowland increased his pace; they increased theirs. He paused; they stopped. It was like a game, Rowland went on again. He was the "guide," it seemed, of this strange awkward squad. But as he neared the turn in the path which led to the gate, the shock-headed man went forward in the direction of the daïs while Ivanitch came a pace closer, bent forward, his long arms hanging, still watching him eagerly. The creature was menacing. The distance to the gate was now short, but the idea of turning his back to this madman, who might spring upon him from behind, was most unpleasant. So Rowland stopped and faced him, catching a glimpse of Tanya Korasov who had followed them and stood nearby, listening and watching, aware of the hazardous moment.

"It is a pleasant morning, Monsieur Ivanitch," said Rowland coolly.

"The gate--is yonder," croaked the Russian. "Go!"

"All in good time," said Rowland. "But I've something to say first."

The Russian's thin lips worked but he said nothing, though his fingers twitched against his legs.

"I thank you for your hospitality--such as it is. But you don't like me, Monsieur. Our sentiments are reciprocal. Your attitude even now is most unpleasant--not to say offensive. Were it not for Mademoiselle, I should have lost my temper long ago."

"Go----! Go----!" cried the Russian chokingly. He seemed trembling on the brink of some nervous paroxysm.

"When I'm ready. In the meanwhile, listen----"

"What have I to do with you?"

"You know best about that," said Rowland coolly, aware of a new desire to probe the mystery if he could.

The eyes of Ivanitch, paling as though they could not endure the sunlight, stared wildly as he raised his haggard face.

"You have known from--from the beginning?" muttered Ivanitch.

"Yes, yes," cried Rowland eagerly.

"It is not true, Kirylo Ivanitch," he heard the girl Tanya crying. "He knew

nothing. He knows nothing now." And then, appealingly to Rowland, "Oh, go, Monsieur. Please go, at once."

But Ivanitch was oblivious.

"Destiny!" he muttered wildly. "The Visconti----!"

Rowland started back.

"Visconti!" he repeated. It was the family name of his own mother.

Ivanitch wagged his great head from side to side, his fists claspng and unclaspng in the throes of some mad indecision. And then he came for Rowland, head down, his long arms groping. The American heard the girl's scream and the shouts of the other men as he sprang aside to elude the rush, but Ivanitch was quick and in a moment they were locked in struggle.

Rowland was tall, wiry and agile, but privation had sapped some of his strength and the grip of the Russian around his body bore him backward up the lawn, along the wall where they both tripped over a projecting root and fell to the ground, Ivanitch uppermost. The fall stunned Rowland, but he managed to get a hand on the Russian's throat and clutched with the strength of desperation. A madman! Once in a German trench he had fought with such another, but there were weapons there, and fortune had favored him. But his fingers seemed to meet in the throat of the fanatic and the grip around his own body relaxed as, with an effort, he threw the man away from him and rolled clear. As he sprang to his feet he was aware of the other men attacking him. There was a sound of shots and the familiar acrid smell of powder, but he felt no pain and as the shock-headed fellow came at him, a short arm blow under the chin sent him reeling against a tree where he crumpled and fell.

As he turned again to meet Ivanitch he had a vision of Tanya with arm upraised and heard her clear voice above the tumult.

"Picard! Issad! Stop! I command you!" And then, "Kirylo! Monsieur Rowlan"! It is madness."

Madness it was, but none of Phil Rowland's choosing. They had fought to a point just below the mound of earth on which he had first seen Tanya by the tree and it was at the foot of the steps that Ivanitch again rushed at him. Rowland's blow staggered him but he came on furiously, and as the arm of the Russian went high over his head, the American caught the glint of sunlight on a weapon and threw up his arm, catching the force of the blow upon his elbow. But he felt a stinging pain in his shoulder and clutched the man's arm as he raised it to strike again. Up the slope of the mound they struggled, breathlessly intent, the one to murder, the other to save himself. Rowland fought coolly now, grimly, smiling as a soldier of the Legion must, aware that only as long as the threatening right arm of the Russian was pinioned was he safe from the treacherous knife. But it was right arm against left and too close to strike. Rowland avoided the stone bench

toward which the Russian had forced him, and twisting suddenly freed his right arm and struck the Russian a fearful blow in the body. He felt the arm of Ivanitch relax and in a second had torn the weapon from his clasp and sent it flying into the bushes. Ivanitch came at him again--and again Rowland struck--each time with greater precision. Ivanitch rushed him against the tree, a branch of which was torn off in Rowland's hand.

[image]

The American caught the glint of sunlight on a weapon.

He heard a cry behind him and a whimper as of an animal in pain from Ivanitch. "The Bough!" he cried. "The Bough!" But as he came on again, Rowland stepped aside and hit him as he passed. The Russian staggered sideways, his head striking the stone bench, rolled down the slope of the mound and lay still.

The American slowly straightened and glanced around him. A sudden silence had fallen. At the foot of the steps stood Tanya Korasov, a revolver in her hand and beside her the scarecrow in black, and the two others, inert, horrified. Rowland breathing hard from his exertions stared stupidly at the misshapen bundle of clothing at the foot of the slope and then down at the branch of the tree which he still held in his hand.

"The Bough!" the shock-headed man muttered in an awed whisper, "the Golden Bough!"

Rowland raised the branch of the tree, looked at it curiously and then dropped it to the ground.

"You saw?----" he gasped to the motionless group below. "You saw? He attacked me. It was self-defense. It was not my fault."

Tanya Korasov had rushed to the sprawling figure in the Prince Albert coat, lifted its head, and then recoiled in horror, her face hidden in her hands.

"You saw," Rowland repeated as he came toward them, "all of you--it was self-defense."

They drew back as he came down the steps but made no effort to molest him.

"The Golden Bough!" the shock-headed man said again. And another, "It is broken."

It was no time for such gibberish. Rowland turned them a scornful shoulder and went over to the girl beside the motionless black figure.

To the question in his eyes the girl's eyes replied.

"He is--dead," she whispered.

And then looked up at Rowland, gaze wide and lips parted.

"And you----"

If there was horror, there was no reproach in her tone. Her attitude was more one of consternation and surprise.

"And you,--Monsieur Rowlan!" she whispered in an awed tone. "It is you who are----"

And then she stopped as though frozen suddenly into immobility and silence.

CHAPTER IV

TANYA

And while he stood, still bewildered by the awed tone and startled air of the girl, he saw that the three men had come forward and had taken position in a group beside him. He glanced at them, at once upon the defensive, but was quickly reassured by their passive appearance and attitude, for they stood with heads bowed, like mourners at the grave of a departed friend--with this difference, that their eyes, oblivious of the figure upon the turf, were turned upon Rowland, gazing expectantly, in an awe like Tanya's, but unlike hers, intimidated, respectful, and obedient. Rowland felt like laughing in their faces, but the figure in the Prince Albert coat upon the ground reminded him that the mystery behind this fantastic tragedy was at least worthy of consideration. Whatever the aims of this strange company and however tawdry the means by which they accomplished them, the fact remained that here at his feet lay Kirylo Ivanitch, dead because of his convictions.

With increasing bewilderment he stared at Tanya and again at the others.

"What do you mean, Mademoiselle?" he asked. "I don't understand."

Her reply mystified him further.

"The Visconti!" she stammered. "You know the name?"

"Visconti, yes. It was the name of my Italian mother."

At this reply Tanya started to her feet and behind him he heard the murmur of excitement.

"Speak, Mademoiselle," said Rowland. "What's this mystery?"

Tanya put her fingers to her brows a moment.

"Something very strange has happened, Monsieur Rowlan!" she said with

difficulty. "Something long predicted--promises written in the legends of Nemi for hundreds of years and it is--it is you, Monsieur, who have fulfilled them."

"I!" he asked in surprise. "How?"

"That the Visconti should again become the heads of our order."

"What order?"

"The Order of the Priesthood of Nemi."

"Priesthood! I?" Rowland grinned unsympathetically at the solemn faces, which were mocking at his common sense, his appreciation of the ridiculous which from the first had held in good-humored contempt the signs of mediæval flummery.

"You, Monsieur," said the man in the cowl, whom they called Issad. "There is no doubt. It is written."

"I've not written it," said Rowland contemptuously.

"The Priest of Nemi--you have broken the Golden Bough," put in the shock-headed man.

"Oh, I see. I broke your silly tree. I'm sorry."

"Sorry!" whispered Issad, pointing to the dead man. "It is he who should be sorry."

"I've no doubt he is," muttered Rowland, "but he brought this on himself."

"That is true," said the third man eagerly, the one Tanya had called Picard. "We are all witnesses to it."

Rowland frowned at the man.

"Then will you tell me what the devil you meant by shooting a pistol at me?" cried Rowland angrily.

Picard hung his head.

"It was he who was the Priest of Nemi--while he lived, our oath, our allegiance----"

"Ah, I see," put in Rowland, "and now the water is on the other shoulder."

He shrugged and as he did so was aware of a sharp pain where the knife of Ivanitch had struck him, and from the fingers of his left hand he saw that blood was dripping.

Tanya, who had stood silent during this conversation, came forward, touching his arm.

"Monsieur is wounded," she said gently. "You must come----"

Rowland impersonally examined the blood at his finger tips.

"If you wish to call the Gendarmes----" he began coolly.

"Gendarmes!" broke out Picard excitedly, "No, Monsieur. There must be no police here. Nemi settles its own affairs."

Rowland glanced at the fellow. He was not hostile, but desperately in earnest, and the faces of the two other men reflected his seriousness. Tanya Ko-

rasov was silent, but into her face had come new lines of decision.

"If you will go into the house, Monsieur," she said quietly, "I will bind your wound and perhaps give you a reason why the police should not be called to Nemi."

Her suggestion reminded him that the wounded shoulder was now tingling unpleasantly, and so, with a glance at the others, who seemed eagerly to assent to his departure, Rowland nodded and followed the girl toward the house.

A while ago the strange actions of this fantastic household had keenly amused him, for Rowland was a product of an unimaginative age, a Nomad of the Cities, bent upon a great errand which had nothing to do with priesthoods. But now the startling sequence of events, culminating in the mention of his mother's name and the death of Ivanitch had made him aware that the arm of coincidence was long, or that Destiny was playing a hand with so sure an intention that he, Phil Rowland, for all his materialism, must accept the facts and what came of them. Destiny! Perhaps. For a year Rowland had believed it his destiny to be killed in battle, instead of which he had lived the life of a dog in a prison camp, and escaped into freedom. But a priest of a secret order, ordained twenty-seven years ago when in the smug security of the orderly Rowland house in West Fifty-ninth Street, he had been born--the thing was unthinkable! But there before him, treading soberly, her slender figure clad in a modish frock which must have come from the Rue de la Paix, was Tanya; and there behind him, in the arms of Picard, Issad and the shock-headed man, was the dead Ivanitch, in token that the prediction of the legends of Nemi had been fulfilled.

He followed the girl into the house and upstairs, where she helped him remove his coat and shirt and bathed and anointed the slight cut in his shoulder. If in his mind he was uncertain as to the judgment of the Twentieth Century upon his extraordinary adventure, he was very sure that Tanya Korasov at least was very real, her fingers very soft, her touch brave, and her expressions of solicitude very genuine. And it was sufficient for Rowland to believe that an intelligence such as that which burned behind her fine level brows, could not be guilty of the worship of false gods. Intelligent, sane and feminine to her finger tips.... The sanity of Tanya more even than the madness of Ivanitch gave credence to the story that she was to tell him....

"Thanks, Mademoiselle," he said gently, when she had finished. "You are very good, to one who has brought so much trouble and distress upon you."

She looked up at him quickly and then away, while into her eyes came a rapt expression as that of one who sees a vision.

"Distress!" she said listlessly, and then slowly, "No, it is not that. Monsieur Ivanitch was nothing to me. But Death--such a death can be nothing less--than horrible."

Her lip trembled, she shuddered a little and he saw that a reaction had set in. She rose to hide her weakness and walked the length of the room.

"Forgive me. I should have gone last night----"

"No, no," she said hysterically. "You can bear no blame--nor I. He attacked you yonder. You had to defend yourself----"

She broke off, clasping her hands and turning away from him.

"How could I have known that you were--that you ... I thought it mere timidity, nervousness on his part--fear born of the danger that had so long hung over him--I knew the legend of Nemi. But Monsieur----" she threw out her arms wildly--"I--I am no dreamer of dreams, no mystic, no fanatic. I have never believed that such strange things could come to pass. But Kirylo Ivanitch had a vision. You were Death! You were stalking him there and he knew----" She laughed hysterically and turned away from him again. "You see, Monsieur, I--I am not quite myself."

Rowland glanced at her steadily a moment and then quickly went to the cupboard where last night she had found the jug of Chartreuse, and pouring her out a glass, carried it to where she stood struggling with herself at the window.

"Drink!" he said sternly. "It will quiet you."

She glanced at the glass, then at him and obeyed.

"Do not speak now," he urged quietly. "Wait until you feel better."

"No, I am well again. I must speak at once. I must tell you all. It is your right to know." She sank resolutely into the chair before him and leaned forward, her hands clasped over her knees, her gaze fixed on the empty hearth.

"Monsieur Ivanitch was--was my compatriot, Monsieur Rowlan'--that is all. I was sent here to him three years ago to help in the great cause to which I have given my life."

"Your parents, Mademoiselle?" broke in Rowland eagerly.

She moved a hand as though to eliminate all things that pertained to herself.

"It does not matter what I am, so long as you know that I am a Russian sworn to bring Russia's freedom from those who seek to work her ruin."

"And Ivanitch----?"

"A Russian born--an exile, a zealot, a possible tool in the hands of those more dangerous than he."

"Mademoiselle. There are others----?"

"Listen, Monsieur. I must begin at the beginning or you will not understand, what my task has been, and what--God willing--you will help me to do."

"I?"

"You, Monsieur."

Rowland was silent, looking at her, sure now of a deeper import to her meaning.

"If there is anything I can do to help Russia, to help France here, you may count upon me," he said quietly.

He might have added to help Tanya Korasov, but something warned him that a hidden fire within her had burst into a flame, which burned out all lesser ones.

Her fine eyes regarded him steadily in a moment of intense appraisal, and then she went on.

"The origin of the Priesthood of Nemi, Monsieur," she said, "is lost in the mazes of antiquity. According to one story, the priesthood began with the worship of Diana, at Nemi, near Rome, and was instituted by Orestes, who fled to Italy. Within the sanctuary at Nemi there grew a certain tree of which no branch might be broken. Only a runaway slave was allowed to break off, if he could, one of its boughs----"

"A runaway slave," he smiled. "Then I----"

She nodded. "You may think it fantastic, but that was what Monsieur Ivanitch feared when he learned last night what you were. And I----" she stopped again. "I could not believe that such things were possible----"

"They aren't," said Rowland, quietly.

His quiet voice steadied her.

"It is a strange tale," she said with a slow smile, "but you must hear it all. Only a runaway slave who succeeded in reaching the Golden Bough and broke it was entitled to challenge the Priest in single combat. If he--killed him, he reigned in the place of the priest, King of the Wood----"

"REX NEMORENSIS----" muttered Rowland.

"You've heard?"

"I read it--there," pointing to the pedestal. And as he looked, the meaning of the double bust came to him, the anguished face of the older man and the frowning face of the youth who was to take his place.

"He was afraid of me," he said. "I understand."

"The legend tells that the Golden Bough," she went on quickly, "was that which at the Sybil's bidding Æneas plucked before he visited the world of the dead, the flight of the slave was the flight of Orestes, his combat with the priest, a relic of the human sacrifices once offered to the Tauric Diana. A rule of succession by the sword which was observed down to imperial times----"

"A ghastly succession--and Ivanitch----?" he questioned.

She frowned and bent forward, her chin cupped in a hand.

"No one knows of his succession--or no one will tell. It was said that when he returned from Siberia, he killed the man who had sent him there."

"A pretty business," said Rowland, rising. "But I did not kill Kirylo Ivanitch----" he protested. "It was he himself who----" He paused and stared at Tanya

thoughtfully.

"You can not deny that if he had not attacked you, he would be here, alive--now."

"That is true, perhaps. But murder--assassination----" He stopped and smiled grimly.

"Mademoiselle Korasov, I'm a soldier and have seen blood shed in a righteous cause. I kill a strange German in a trench because there is not room for us both, and because I am trained to kill as a duty I owe to France. But this----" he waved his hand toward the garden--"this is a brawl. A man attacks me. I defend myself--I strike him with my fists when I might have plunged his own knife into his heart. You saw me--I threw his knife away and fought as we do in my own country, with my hands. If he falls and strikes his head upon a stone----"

He broke off with a shrug.

"Whatever your rights, and I bear witness to them--nevertheless, Monsieur--justified as you are in our eyes and your own conscience, it was you who killed Kirylo Ivanitch."

He stared at her for a moment. Her brows were drawn, but her eyes peered beyond him, as though only herself saw with a true vision. No fanatic--no dreamer? Then what was behind her thoughts--the ones she had not uttered?

"The man is dead," he mumbled. "If I am guilty of his death, I want a court, a judge. I will abide by the law----"

But Tanya was slowly shaking her head.

"There shall be no Court, no Judges but those of Nemi. We saw--we know. There shall be no inquiry. Nemi shall bury its own dead, and you, Monsieur----"

"And I?" he asked as she paused.

"You, Monsieur Rowlan', shall be the Head of the Order of Nemi."

"But, Mademoiselle! You don't understand. I am a part of the Armies of Republican France--a part of the great machinery--a small part, lost but now restored to go on with the great task, a free world has set itself to do."

"A great task!" The girl had risen now and caught him by the arm with a grasp that seemed to try to burn its meaning into his very bones. And her voice, sunk to a whisper, came to his ears with tragic clearness. "There's a greater task for you here--Monsieur. A task that will take greater courage than facing the grenades of the trenches, a task that will take more than courage,--a task only for one of skill, intelligence and great daring. Is it danger that you seek? You will find it here--a danger that will lurk with you always, an insidious threat that will be most dangerous when least anticipated. There are others, Monsieur Rowlan', who may be taught to shoot from the trenches, but there is another destiny for you, a great destiny--to do for the world what half a million of armed men have it not within their power to do. It is here--that destiny--here at Nemi and the weapons

shall be forged in your brain, Monsieur, subtle weapons, keen ones, subtler and keener than those of the enemies who will be all about you--your enemies, but more important than that--the enemies of France, or Russia, England and all the free peoples of the Earth----

She had seemed inspired and her eager eyes, raised to his, burned with a gorgeous fire.

"Germany!" he whispered. "Here?"

"Here--everywhere. They plot--they plan, they seek control--to put men in high places where the cause of Junkerism may be served----

"But they cannot!"

"I have not told you all. Listen!" She released his arm and sat. "You have misjudged us here. To your Western eyes we were mere actors in a morbid comedy of our own choosing, masqueraders, or fanatics, pursuing our foolish ritual in a sort of mild frenzy of self-absorption. But Nemi means something more than that. It reaches back beyond ancient Rome, comes down through the ages, through Italy, the Holy Roman Empire, through France, Germany and Russia, a secret society, the oldest in the history of the world, and the most powerful, with tentacles reaching into the politics of Free Masonry, of Socialism, of Nihilism, of Maximalism. The society of Nemi, an international society, with leaders in every party, a hidden giant with a hundred groping arms which only need a brain to actuate them all to one purpose."

She paused a moment, her hand at her heart, while she caught her breath. "And that purpose--Monsieur Rowlan--the saving of the world from autocracy!" she said impressively.

He did not dare smile at her for her revelations were astounding, and in spite of himself all that was venturesome in his spirit had caught of her fire. The rapidity of her utterance and the nature of her disclosures for a moment struck him dumb. How much of this story that she told him was true, and how much born in the brain of the dead Ivanitch? A secret society with ramifications throughout Europe--a power which might pass into the hands of the enemies of France. Rowland was not dull, and clear thinking was slowly driving away the mists of illusion, leaving before him the plain facts of his extraordinary situation.

"I am no believer in mysticism, Mademoiselle Korasov," he said at last, smiling, "nor in a destiny written before I was born. What you tell of the history of Nemi is interesting, what you say of the Visconti very strange, startlingly so, but I am the product of an age of materialism. This drama was born and developed in the brain of a dreamer and zealot. Don't you see? A strange coincidence unhinged him. He attacked me as he might have attacked any other escaping prisoner----

"But all escaping prisoners are not of the Visconti----" she said.

He shrugged and smiled. "I still think you more than half believe in all this--

---" he hesitated a moment, and then with cool distinctness, "this fol-de-rol."

She glanced up quickly and rose.

"Listen, Monsieur," she said soberly, "you may believe what you please of the legends of Nemi, but you cannot deny the material facts as to its influence. There are documents here which will prove to you that what I say is true. Members of the Order of Nemi are high in the Councils of the Great--its power is limitless for evil or for good in the world. Whether you believe in it or not, you are its Leader, in accordance with its strange laws of succession, which have come down through the ages, and you are recognized as such by those others yonder, and will be recognized by others who will come. Its High Priest----

Rowland's gesture of impatience made her pause.

"I'm no Priest----" he laughed.

"Call yourself what you like, then," she cried. "It does not matter. But think, Monsieur, of what I am telling you. An opportunity--power, international leadership, and a goal,--the freedom of Europe! Oh, is not that a career worthy of the ambition of any man on the earth! And you quibble at the sound of a name!"

Her tone was almost contemptuous. She had walked to the window and stood there trembling--he paused a moment and then walked over to her.

"I haven't denied you, Mademoiselle. I've merely refused to believe in the supernatural. Call my presence here a coincidence, the death of Kirylo Ivanitch by its true name, an act of involuntary man-slaughter and I will do whatever you like--if I can serve France better here than on the battle-line."

She flashed around on him and clasped his hand.

"You mean it?"

"I do. If I can help you here, I will act whatever part you please."

"At once? There is no time to lose."

"I shall obey you."

"No. It is I who must obey you--and they--Picard, Issad, Stepan, Margot--but more than these--Shestov, Madame Rochal, Signorina Colodna, and Liederman--"

"Who are these?"

"Members of the Order. Councilors who will come to you--to give advice and to take it."

He smiled.

"Ah, I see. They are coming here soon?"

She nodded.

"A council has been called--the members may reach here today. You will meet them?"

"Have I not told you that I will do what I can? But I must know their nationalities, their purposes----

"Oh, I shall tell you all that--and warn you. Remember, Monsieur, you are the Leader of Nemi----"

"And as such," he grinned, "subject to sacrifice upon the altar of your precious Priesthood----"

She touched the back of his hand lightly with her fingers.

"Sh----! Monsieur. It is no laughing matter. And there are those I must warn you against." Her eyes stared widely past him from under tangled brows. "Two whom you must fear--of finesse, craft and intelligence--a woman without a conscience and a man without a soul----"

"Ah, you interest me. A woman! Their names----"

Before Tanya Korasov could reply, there was a knock upon the door which was pushed quickly open and the shock-headed man entered.

"What is it, Stepan?" asked the girl.

"Monsieur Khodkine has just come in at the gate, Mademoiselle," he said in French.

Rowland saw the girl start and felt her fingers close upon his arm.

"Ah, Stepan," she said quietly, "tell him to come here, and bring Issad and Picard."

And when Stepan had gone, "It is one of those whom I have spoken, Monsieur Rowlan," she stammered. "Be upon your guard, Monsieur--and keep this paper, committing to memory the names and figures upon it."

Rowland opened the slip of paper curiously and it bore this inscription:

"Droite 12 Gauche 23 Droite 7."

CHAPTER V

KHODKINE

Was it imagination that gave him the idea that the manner of Tanya Korasov betrayed a sudden inquietude at the mention of the name of the newcomer? He was sure that the fingers which touched his sleeve in warning were trembling as she glanced wide-eyed toward the door into the garden by which Monsieur Khodkine would enter. Who was this visitor, and what his mission, what his power, what his authority?

Stepan threw the door open and stood aside, bowing as the visitor entered, followed by Issad and Picard. He was tall and well built, with blonde hair brushed

straight back from a broad fine brow, below which steel-blue eyes appraised the room and its occupants. His nose was straight and well chiseled, and his small brown mustache carefully groomed, defined rather than concealed the straight firm line of his rather red lips, which parted slightly as he saw the figure of Rowland before him. His glance met the American's, hovered a second and passed to Tanya, who had risen and stood mute and expectant.

The Russian crossed the room quickly to the girl, and taking the fingers she extended, bowed over them and pressed them to his lips.

"Tatyana!" he said in French, with a deep and pleasant voice. "The days have sped into weeks, the weeks into months, since I have seen you----"

"Grisha Khodkine, you are welcome!" said the girl, withdrawing her hand, and as the Russian straightened, turned toward the American whom she indicated with a graceful gesture. "You are to meet a--a visitor to Nemi, Monsieur. Permit me to present Monsieur Rowlan."

The Russian straightened and his clear and slightly surprised gaze passed impudently over the American's ill-fitting clothing from head to foot. Rowland had a sense that it was the garments which Monsieur Khodkine noted, not the man within them, and had a feeling of being still further ignored when the Russian, after the slightest inclination of the head, which indeed had seemed a part of his cursory inspection, turned again quickly to Tanya.

"Where is Kirylo Ivanitch?" he asked.

The girl leaned with one hand upon the table, her gaze upon the floor. Her voice trembled a little as she replied.

"Kirylo Ivanitch is--is dead."

Khodkine started violently.

"Dead! Ivanitch----!" He turned a quick look at Stepan and at Rowland. "When did this happen?" he questioned eagerly. "And who----?"

His look as though impelled returned to Rowland, who had picked up one of the cigarettes of Monsieur Ivanitch from the table and was now lighting it, very much at his ease. Rowland made no reply, and Tanya, with a gesture of her extended fingers:

"It happened but just now,--this morning, Grisha Khodkine," she said. "For some days Kirylo Ivanitch had been distraught with nerves, in a kind of strange fit of uncertainty. He was frightened.... He bade us keep watch upon the Tree and what lies below it day and night. And to humor him we obeyed. We did not know what was to happen--something strange, Grisha Khodkine----"

As she paused the Russian looked from one to the other in astonishment and mystification.

"Dead!--but how? What happened?"

"This morning," the girl went on, choosing her words carefully, "he attacked

Monsieur Rowlan', in the garden, as he was leaving Nemi. Monsieur Rowlan' defended himself, and struck--struck----" Tanya hid her face in her hands, trembling.

"Go on----" said the Russian.

"There is little else to tell," said the girl, raising her pallid face from her hands, "Kiryo fell--He is--dead!"

Khodkine's gaze sought the eyes of the other men in confirmation.

"It is the truth, Monsieur," muttered Picard. "We saw. It was a fair combat. But it was written--what happened!"

Monsieur Khodkine's look passed slowly from one to the other and at last rested on Rowland, who met his glance calmly, soberly, without deference--but without defiance.

"He tried to kill me, Monsieur," he said quietly, "he was dangerous, and so--" He shrugged. "What would you? He fell and his head struck a stone----"

The Russian stared a moment.

"Then you----" He paused.

Rowland smiled a little.

"It seems, Monsieur," he said coolly, "that I am your new Priest of Nemi."

There was a long silence during which the Russian stared at Rowland more intently as though correcting a former and mistaken impression. At last he took a pace forward and the eyes of the two men met.

"You--you knew?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Rowland.

"And now----?"

The American shrugged but Picard broke in eagerly: "All the conditions have been fulfilled, Monsieur Khodkine--all from the first to the last----"

And while Rowland stood silent, in good-humored contempt, the Frenchman told all that had happened, including the American's escape from imprisonment and the breaking of the Bough. Rowland keenly watched all the actors in this drama, the zealous sincerity of the excitable Frenchman, the mystic absorption of Stepan, the fixed burning gaze of Issad, sure that those who played the minor parts were committed beyond question to a strict interpretation of the symbols of the order. Tanya, the color coming slowly into her cheeks, answered briefly and clearly the questions that were put to her. If there had been restraint in her acceptance of this successor to Ivanitch, or wonder at the strange chain of facts which linked this matter-of-fact American with the destinies of Nemi, she spoke now with an air of definite assurance and fatalism which went far to convince Rowland that if she were not sincere in her beliefs she was playing a skillful part which warned him how deeply he too was committed to his strange new office. But it was Monsieur Khodkine that Rowland watched the closest. From an expression of consternation the face of the Russian settled into a frowning inquiry

and then as his glance and Rowland's met, into a mask-like immobility which revealed nothing of his own state of mind. As one by one the facts were revealed to him, his voice became more quiet, his manner more suave, while he nodded his head in solemn deliberation. The phrases he used were theirs, the jargon of mysticism, and yet to Rowland, the man of the world, this change of tone and demeanor failed to comport with the very obvious air of modernity and materialism which Monsieur Khodkine had brought in with him from the world outside.

"The Bough--broken," Khodkine was muttering, "an escaped prisoner of the Germans,--a slave surely! And the combat--either one may challenge.... The Visconti.... There seems no doubt. Yes--it is strange. You say that Monsieur Rowland did not know the tradition...?"

"Not until after Kirylo Ivanitch was dead," said Tanya calmly. "I told him."

"It is most extraordinary," repeated Khodkine, turning to Rowland with level brows. "An act of Destiny, striking as with the hand of God from out of the mists of the Eternal ages. But it is a sign too definite to be ignored--an act of Revelation and a Prophecy."

The words were spoken soberly, with an air of rapt introspection, but Rowland missed nothing of the alert intelligence of Monsieur Khodkine's pale blue eyes, keen and observing, which unlike Issad, the dreamer's, fairly blazed with objectivity.

The impression that Monsieur Khodkine was playing a part, became more definite. He acted a little too well. The talk of mysticism and destiny fell a little too glibly from his lips to be quite in keeping with Rowland's reading of his character, which made the Russian out to be a politician of an advanced type, a doctrinaire perhaps, but an intriguer with a definite and perhaps sordid purpose, who had come expecting to find the dreamer Ivanitch, and instead had found a heretic and an unbeliever. But under this skillful camouflage of mere words, which though they may have meant much to Issad, Stepan and Picard, conveyed nothing to Rowland, he hid his disappointment well, and when all questions had been answered, he went and viewed the dead Ivanitch and agreed as the others had done to an immediate interment of the body.

Through it all Rowland had said little, reading in the quick furtive glances of the girl Tanya a silent petition to accede in these arrangements, and so when the orders had been given Rowland returned with Monsieur Khodkine to the room on the lower floor where Tanya, after a warning glance which Rowland interpreted and answered, left the two men to their own devices. Rowland, now fully aware that he was to deal with a man of no ordinary ability, took a leaf from Monsieur Khodkine's book and fairly met him at his own game.

"An American, Monsieur!" began the Russian, after they had lighted their cigarettes. "It is indeed a far cry from the 'white lights' of Broadway to the Priest-

hood of Nemi----"

"Ah, you know New York?" asked Rowland.

"I have been there. An extraordinary city--a wonderful people--intensely practical. But you are no nation of dreamers, Monsieur."

"Upon the contrary," replied Rowland, politely. "Were we not dreamers--we should long since have finished disastrously our experiment in individualism. Like you in Russia we dream, Monsieur, but unlike you, our dreams come true."

Khodkine gazed at Rowland with a new interest. Was this smiling American less stupid than he looked?

"Individualism! Yes. You are even slaves to liberty, which has made you the mere creatures of your own desires."

"You are a monarchist, Monsieur Khodkine?" asked Rowland, with an innocent gaze.

"May the good God forbid!" cried Khodkine abruptly. "I am a Russian, of the heart of Russia which throbs with the pulse-beats of humanity. The Czar has fallen, but the era of absolutism in Russia is not yet over."

Rowland shifted his knees and fixed a cool look of inquiry upon Khodkine.

"I am only a soldier, Monsieur," he said. "For a year I have been in a prison camp. As you must see, I am vastly ignorant of what is going on in the world."

"Then you must know that my country has changed in nothing but a name. Instead of monarchy we have oligarchy--a band of men bent upon usurping the rights of the people. The people of Russia are drunk with freedom and accept the new order of things because they think it is what they have long fought for. But the men now in power in the Provisional Government are not to be trusted--capitalists, bureaucrats, the enemies of----"

"You are a Socialist Democrat, then, Monsieur?" put in Rowland.

"A friend of Russia's freedom--call me by whatever name you please."

Khodkine shrugged and blew a cloud of smoke.

"You mean that there are still those in power who are in sympathy with Germany?" asked Rowland.

Khodkine rose and walked the length of the room while Rowland watched him keenly.

"What else? Is it not clear to you?"

"I am perhaps dull, Monsieur," said Rowland, vacuously. "Rasputin is dead. The Czarina has gone. In them you will admit the fountain heads of German intrigue have been destroyed."

"Diverted, let us say, Monsieur--upon the surface. But the evil stream still flows--secretly, below the ground, to appear in high places where least expected."

Rowland rose and threw his cigarette into the hearth.

"I have no doubt that what you say is true, Monsieur Khodkine. I am not

wise. If I am to be of service here"--Rowland paused significantly, until he found Khodkine's gaze--"if I am to be of service here, I must trust myself into the hands of those who have a deeper insight into the politics of Europe than myself. I have promised Mademoiselle Korasov to stay at Nemi and do what I can. I would like to help." He paused again and then, with an air of frankness: "Perhaps, Monsieur Khodkine, I could do no better than to entrust myself into your hands."

Khodkine turned half toward him, his fine white teeth showing in a smile and then thrust forth a hand in confirmation.

"Can it be that you will trust me?"

"Implicitly."

Khodkine's pale eyes glowed with purpose.

"Ah, that is good, Monsieur Rowlan'. It seems that the hand which guides the destiny of Nemi is still unerring." And then more quietly, "You know what power is yours to command?"

"Mademoiselle Korasov has told me something,--but with skillful advisers--

"All will be well, Monsieur. But you will have many advisers. They are coming here today, but you must select the wheat from the chaff. I shall tell you whom to trust. Russia must be born again. You shall help her in the pains of birth--save her from the malevolent hands which threaten to throttle her in the very act of being."

"It is a great destiny you plan, Monsieur. The society of Nemi may be powerful, but I can hardly believe that such a powerful autocracy as Germany----"

"Tst--Monsieur! You have heard some of the rumblings in the Reichstag. Liebknecht the elder blazed the way. His son has followed----"

"Oh, yes, Liebknecht. I've heard----"

"Only the military might of Germany holds the nation intact, but even in its might it trembles. Nemi is strong in Germany. In many regiments the socialists have revolted and in the navy--mutiny. Those men realize that there is a force let loose into the world, before which the selfish aims of the rulers of the countries of the earth are as chaff in the wind. Not one nation shall rule, or several, but all--Monsieur. All! Internationalism--! Do you know what that means?"

And as Rowland remained silent, as though in deep thought, Khodkine threw his long arms out in a wide gesture.

"You shall see. The time comes soon----"

"And you will help me, Monsieur?" Rowland asked urbanely.

"With all my heart and intelligence."

Khodkine smiled and the two men clasped hands. Monsieur Khodkine's hands were very white and as smooth as a woman's, but there was strength in the sinew beneath. Internationalism! A fine word! which might mean anything.... If this man were Rowland's enemy, at least he should not start with any advantage.

The new Leader of Nemi was learning, still moving in the dark, for the names of those who had come into power in Russia, Lvoff, Rodzianko--and the others had seemed to stand for all that was best in the interests of free government. And so he had led Monsieur Khodkine out, that he might inspect, in profile, as it were, the motives which underlay his politics. As yet nothing definite--only a suspicion. As to the sincerity of his beliefs in the ritual of Nemi, Rowland was soon enlightened.

"You are a practical man, Monsieur Rowland," Khodkine went on easily. "You are no doubt mystified by the curious sequence of events which have brought you here to Nemi, as titular head of this great and secret order. But I too am a practical man, and I will be frank with you. I care nothing for symbols. Whatever the society of Nemi is in the minds of its legion of followers, to me it is merely a means to a great end--the safety and peace of all Europe. The fulfillment of the promises of the legend is extraordinary--almost incredible, but neither you nor I as men of the world can believe that it comes from any supernatural agency. Kirylo Ivanitch was immolated upon the altar of his own fears, a sacrifice to his own superstition. He killed the Priest who preceded him. For years his Nemesis, a true Nemesis, my friend, has pursued him. But you, Monsieur, must permit no such doubts to poison your usefulness."

"Why should I," laughed Rowland. "A man attacks me, stabs me with a knife. If he is killed, is it my fault? My conscience is clear."

"Good. Then we understand each other." He broke off with a shrug.

"As to the ritual of Nemi. There is a strength in mysticism, a fact which the vile Rasputin was not long in finding out. A little ceremonial does no harm and you, Monsieur, must play your part with skill and some caution."

"By all means," said Rowland, with a laugh. "Until the new priest of Nemi shall find me out. Then at least I assure you that I shall not stand on ceremony."

"Ah, as to that, you may reassure yourself," said Khodkine, easily. "A Miracle such as this may sometime happen by chance, but not twice in one generation."

"At least," Rowland concluded cheerfully, "you may be sure that I am not afraid."

"Perhaps it is well that we have a soldier at Nemi," said Khodkine with a smile. And then after a pause--"Tell me, Monsieur. Did Mademoiselle Korasov commit to your keeping any documents--any papers?"

"None," lied Rowland coolly. "As you know, this affair has happened so recently----"

"There were no papers found upon the body of Monsieur Ivanitch?"

"If they have not been removed by Issad or Stepan, they should be upon his body now."

"Ah! I will inquire." And getting up quickly, Monsieur Khodkine made his way out of the room in the direction of the adjoining apartment.

Tanya, a warning finger to her lips, joined Rowland immediately. It seemed that she must have been near the door, waiting for the chance to speak with him alone.

"You were careful?" she asked.

"As careful as a person may be who walks on a floor carpeted with egg-shells," said Rowland with a smile.

"He asked if I had told you anything, given you anything?"

Rowland nodded.

"He has gone to search the body," he said.

"For the paper I gave you," whispered Tanya. "I found it in the pocket-book of Kirylo Ivanitch. I took it--there in the garden as I knelt beside him. You have committed it to memory?"

"Yes. *Droite 72 Gauche 23 Droite 7----*"

"Sh--! You can remember it?"

"Yes."

"Then destroy it quickly."

Rowland struck a match, lighted the scrap of paper and threw it into the hearth. She went toward the door, stood in a tense moment of listening and then quickly returned.

"Do not trust him, Monsieur, and be upon your guard against him always. For the present nothing more. I shall contrive to meet you tonight."

She walked to the chair which Monsieur Khodkine had left and motioned Rowland to another, and then raising her voice, spoke easily in a conversational tone of the members of the Council who were to join them later in the day. A few moments later Monsieur Khodkine, his brows troubled in thought, came into the room.

"You found nothing?" asked Tanya.

"His watch, the talisman, some keys, a little money. Nothing else."

"What was it you were looking for, Monsieur?" enquired Rowland.

Khodkine glanced at Tanya and shrugged.

"A memorandum--it does not matter."

CHAPTER VI

During the afternoon other members of the Council of Nemi reached the village and arrived at the gate in the wall where Issad, clad in his dark robes and sensible of his own importance, greeted them with all solemnity and conducted them to the house where Tanya Korasov, Khodkine and Rowland received them. First, Shestov, who was blonde, bald and slightly pock-marked, with a long neck consisting mostly of tendons and Adam's apple. Shestov spoke French with a thickness of tongue which gave the impression of a being constantly under the influence of liquor,--a mere impediment of the speech, for as Rowland afterward discovered, no spirits of any kind had ever passed his lips. Then came Liederman and Mademoiselle Colodna. Liederman was heavy, Hebraic and noisy; Irina Colodna silent, abstracted and intense; Monsieur Barthou, mild mannered, quiet but eager, his sandy hair cropped short, his little red-rimmed eyes magnified many fold behind his enormous goggles. And lastly Madame Rochal.

If internationalism was the keynote of Monsieur Khodkine's politics, the term might in a general way be applied to the curious and striking personality of Madame Rochal, for she reflected such an intense cosmopolitanism that it was at first difficult to identify her with any nation of Europe. Her name might have been French, Russian or Spanish, and her gown might have come from Paris or Vienna. She spoke all languages, French, German, Russian, English with equal facility, each it seemed with a slight accent or tinge of the others, but without preference or favor. Her eyes, set a little obliquely in her head, were of the night, dark and unfathomable, and her hair, black with a faint green-violet gloss, was folded back at each side over her ears like the two wings of a raven. She was jeweled, exotic, slightly tinted, and exhaled a faint suggestion of daintily mingled perfumes. To all appearances she was less than thirty in years, though in her eyes lurked the wisdom of the centuries.

All of these persons were informed by Monsieur Khodkine, the earliest arrival, of the tragic event of the morning and of Philip Rowland's share in it. Monsieur Khodkine pitched his drama in a low key, spoke with great seriousness and earnestly requested the new arrivals to consider the evidence in the light of their own understanding and showed them the body of Ivanitch and the broken Bough, in token of the fulfillment of the prophecy. As to his own mind, he said, that was already made up. As a member of the Order, he would take commands from none other than Monsieur Rowland, who was now the President of the Order of Nemi. Rowland said nothing and stood soberly trying not to laugh, studying this queerly assorted company who had listened to the Russian, regarding the American with a new and rather morbid interest, appraising him (so Rowland thought) as one examines an egg which one expects to devour.

Whatever the others may have thought, only Liederman was outspoken. He got up, swaying from one foot to the other, like a great brown bear, his hairy fists

clenched, his black brows beetling as he roared his opinions in a French tinged abominably with gutturals.

"Pfui! A new priest and an American! You have a doctrine over in your country. You should permit us to apply it here--Europe for Europeans, Monsieur--We do not need to go so far--

"But the laws of the Order----" broke in Khodkine.

"Pouf, Grisha Khodkine. We are no longer children, believing in the necromancy of the middle ages. I for one am no exorcist. We live in no day of incantations, nor can we accept the idols which a past age has set up for us. The train of coincidences is extraordinary, but let us accept it as such and end the matter. The Council of Nemi has borne with Kirylo Ivanitch, because as we all know he formed a proper buffer between our conflicting aims. But Kirylo Ivanitch is dead. When our numbers are filled, let us elect a leader, a Priest if you still choose to call him such, who will conduct our meetings and do our bidding. As for this Monsieur Rowland----" and he gave a grunt, "as far as I am concerned, he may very well go upon his way."

"That is impossible," came the cold, clear voice of Madame Rochal, her strange eyes fixed on Rowland's face. "The new Leader of the Order of Nemi has already been selected in accordance with a Destiny which it is not my privilege--nor yours, Herr Leiderman, to thwart."

Herr Leiderman stopped rocking and stared at the speaker, a look of sudden perplexity at his brows.

"You! Zoya!" he roared.

"I," she returned with a quick flash of her eyes. "And why not? God knows we need new wits to bring us harmony. Why not Monsieur Rowland's?"

"But----"

She shrugged and turned to Shestov who was speaking.

"Madame Rochal is not often wrong and her influence is not to be despised. For Russia I can speak. A man who is willing to offer his own blood unselfishly in sacrifice for a nation not his own, is a friend to Freedom and to Russia."

The red-rimmed eyes of Monsieur Barthou blinked enormously behind his goggles. "I am for the old order of things--as they have been since the beginning---"

"And shall be everlastingly," said Khodkine sententiously. "Amen. And you, Irina Colodna?" he asked.

"What has been, shall be," she replied in her soft Italian accent. "Whatever happens--the order must not be broken."

"Bah!" thundered Liederman, "and jeopardize our leadership of the cause of the world by investing this adventurer, this soldier of fortune, with the right to----"

"Hush! Max!" cried Zoya Rochal shrilly. "You are a beast."

Liederman rocked in a moment of silence and then sank into a chair, his fists clasped over his folded arms.

Rowland regarded him a moment and then as the gaze of the others was turned toward him, took a pace forward, faced them, and after a glance at Khodkine spoke quietly, and with growing assurance, while the smile that always lurked at the corners of his lips seemed to be struggling against his sober demeanor.

"Messieurs and Mesdames," he said politely, "I am, as this excellent and voracious Herr Liederman has just said, both an adventurer and a soldier of fortune. But if he chooses to turn these words against me I can only reply that I am an adventurer in the greatest cause the world has ever known, a soldier for the fortune of freedom which is to come. I am no diplomat but a soldier of France which stands resolute, undaunted, immovable upon its new frontier. I have been in the cauldron before Verdun and thus am the only one among you who has seen Hell upon this earth. I say to you Messieurs and Mesdames that death is nothing when compared to the tension of nerves tightened like bow-strings. After that I say there is no war that can be right--no Peace that can be wrong." There was a movement of approval and Rowland grinned comfortably and then went on--"Your cause is mine and whatever the means by which you accomplish peace, that is mine also. I will do your bidding if you desire it, but if, as Herr Liederman suggests, the good of your Society is best conserved by my departure I am ready to go upon my way----"

"Enough, Monsieur!" Zoya Rochal rose and threw out one white hand in a wide gesture. "We need you at Nemi, Monsieur Rowland--Is it not so, you others--?"

She challenged them quietly, but her eyes shot fire at the silent Liederman, who stared up at her from under heavy brows and shrugged.

"I am out-voted," he said; "I have no more to say."

"That is well," said Khodkine. He crossed the room and clasped Rowland by the hands, an example which all the others now followed. Tanya had stood at one side, a silent spectator of this scene smiling slightly, aware of her own part in this decision, but watching keenly as they came forward. Madame Rochal was the last to greet the visitor. Their hands met and Rowland bowed over the jeweled fingers.

"I thank you for your indulgence, Madame," he said.

"Do not let Herr Liederman disturb you," she whispered, "we are of many minds at Nemi. But the danger lies not in what is said, Monsieur, but what is unsaid."

"I understand. Perhaps you'll help me----"

"Perhaps. We shall see."

And with a deep look into Rowland's eyes, she passed on and joined the others who following Margot, the old woman whom Rowland had seen in the kitchen, went up the stairs to be shown the rooms they were to occupy. For a moment Rowland and Tanya were alone.

"You think her beautiful?" the girl asked.

"Magnetic, startling--but beautiful--? The *beauté du Diable* perhaps, but Mademoiselle----"

Tanya moved her expressive fingers.

"She is the most dangerous woman in Europe."

"You alarm me," he grinned. "The only powder a soldier fears is the *Poudre de Riz*."

She smiled.

"I'm not jesting."

"Nor I. You warn me against her?"

"If you love freedom. She is an agent of the Wilhelmstrasse."

"Ah--I see. But her nationality?"

"No one knows. What does it matter? She is an actress--a friend of princes, in Russia, in Austria, a go-between, a shuttle-cock playing her own game for her own ends."

"And Liederman--?"

"Is it not obvious? Her servitor."

"But why should she have chosen to accept me without question as the new President of the Order?"

Tanya was silent a moment, and then:

"Because, if I may make so bold as to say so," she said, "your guileless appearance marks a line of least resistance best suited to her methods of attack. Kirylo Ivanitch was immune. She thinks to find you less difficult. In other words," she finished dryly, "she means to use you, Monsieur."

"I shall be guileless, Mademoiselle, as long as I can learn something, but not too guileless to be ungrateful to you." She shrugged and laughed as he glanced toward the stairway whence came the sound of voices.

Rowland laughed quietly. "I'm pledged to you, to Khodkine and to Madame Rochal. Messieurs Shestov and Barthou are perhaps on my side. Before the hour passes I shall swear allegiance to Signorina Colodna and Herr Liederman," he grinned, "the society of Nemi at least shall be cohesive and I shall be the amalgam."

"This is no joke."

"Nevertheless I shall not cry over it----"

He caught her hand and pressed it in his strong fingers. "Will you let me solve these problems in my own way? If I seem to be guileless, humor me for my simplicity but do not distrust me, Mademoiselle--for of all these who are at Nemi

it is you only who shall be my guide."

"You swear it?" she whispered.

"Upon my honor."

Her face flamed suddenly and her glance fell.

Then he kissed her hand and released her just as Khodkine entered from the garden where what had once been Kirylo Ivanitch had, without ceremony, been put below the ground. But the lines at Monsieur Khodkine's brows were not born of this gruesome informality for it seemed that Nemi turned without question from old gods to new, but of another matter which for some hours had obviously given him inquietude.

"If Monsieur Rowland will permit," he said gravely turning to Tanya, "Madoiselle Korasov is best informed to speak of the affairs of Kirylo Ivanitch and of the business pending in the Council----"

"Shall I leave you, Monsieur?" asked Rowland.

"Why? You are one of us--our leader----"

Rowland chose to read something satirical in his ceremonious bow.

"Well," said the American good-humoredly, "what's the order of business?"

"The reports from the various central committees which these Councilors represent, appropriations of money to carry on the propaganda and the plans for Russia. But first it is necessary to see into the condition of the affairs of Monsieur Ivanitch. The vault must be opened."

"The vault?" echoed Rowland.

Khodkine nodded and glanced at Tanya.

"The Priest of Nemi is sole custodian of the documents and funds of the order. Only Ivanitch knew the secret of the doors to the vault----" Here he turned suddenly to the girl--"Unless perhaps *you*, Tatyana----"

"What should I know, Grisha Khodkine?" she said coolly. "I have merely obeyed orders. Kirylo Ivanitch entrusted me with no such weighty responsibility as this."

"And yet it is strange, that no record should be left----"

"Kirylo Ivanitch died without speaking."

"But you Tatyana were closest in his confidence. He must have given some sign, left some paper----"

"Search for it then, his room, his desk, his clothing----"

"I have done so. There is nothing."

Rowland found another cigarette which he lighted with the greatest cheerfulness.

"An *impasse*," he smiled, "what are you going to do about it?"

Khodkine shrugged.

"That is a grave question, Monsieur Rowland."

"Dynamite," suggested the American. Khodkine paced the floor slowly for a moment, and then to the girl.

"Go, Tatyana, if you please, and make a thorough search. Perhaps you may succeed where I have failed."

Tanya turned toward the door and then paused. "And the others, what shall you say to them?" she asked.

"Tell them the truth," said Khodkine.

The Russian waited until Tanya had gone and then coming close to the new President of Nemi, spoke rapidly and in whispers.

"You and I are allied for a common purpose. The vault is outside in the garden, deep under the Tree, we must find a way into it, you comprehend, without the knowledge of these others."

"Yes, but how?"

"That we shall devise. I will find a way." At the sound of voices he glanced toward the door. "Meanwhile," he whispered, "say nothing."

Rowland nodded and they drew apart as Madame Rochal and Shestov entered the room.

"Ah, Machiavelli," she said, coming forward with a smile--"already wrapping your tendrils around the Tree of Nemi."

Khodkine laughed uneasily.

"My tendrils perhaps do not grow so far or cling so tightly as yours may do, Madame."

Zoya Rochal glanced at Rowland who caught her look.

"For the wild rose, Madame," said the new Priest quietly, "the oak always bears a life-long friendship."

"Ah, Monsieur, who has taught you to make pretty speeches? But be sure that I am no poison vine," she said with a shrug.

"It is only the dead oak tree that the poison-vine loves. I, Madame, am very much alive."

She flashed a quick smile at him, at once a challenge and a reproach, while Khodkine looked on gravely.

"Only an escaping slave shall break the golden Bough," muttered the literal Shestov soberly.

Zoya Rochal laughed. "You, Grisha Khodkine?" she said significantly.

Khodkine started.

"Or you, Madame," he replied quickly.

"A slave?" she said. "I have escaped from one servitude into another. But to have political opinions in Russia is fortunately no longer a crime."

Rowland looked from one to the other and laughed.

"Monsieur Shestov has rendered me a service," he said with a grin. "I didn't

know of this menace. If you, Madame Rochal, desire my life you shall take it at once." He picked up the dagger of Kirylo Ivanitch which had been brought into the house and put upon the table, and thrust the handle toward her. But she shuddered prettily and turned away. "As for you, Monsieur Khodkine," he said coolly, "from this moment I must be upon my guard."

But the Russian saw no humor in this pleasantry.

"Enough of this nonsense, Monsieur. Let us go in to dinner."

And yet this controversy which had been heard by the others who had followed Zoya Rochal into the room, in spite of its apparent triviality, had done something to clear the atmosphere. Rowland's perfect good humor and air of guilelessness which seemed to see nothing but good humor and guilelessness in all those about him, had the effect of providing a common meeting ground of good-fellowship for those of different camps. And whatever the diversity of their opinions, the darkness of their thoughts and purposes, the dinner table gave no sign of the deeper undercurrents of their various allegiances.

And when they all rose from the table at the conclusion of the meal Rowland and Madame Rochal went to smoke their cigarettes.

"I can't make you out, Monsieur Rowland," she said when they were seated on a bench at the end of the garden. "At times you seem very much like an overgrown boy," she began, "and then--something makes me think that you are not so ingenuous as you look."

"I have traveled the world over, Madame," said Rowland with a laugh, "but I've never managed to learn anything, except that women are very beautiful and that men are born to be slaves."

She laid her fingers along his coat sleeve.

"Don't you know, foolish boy," she muttered with sudden earnestness, "that you have happened upon the very edge of an Inferno?"

"No, you surprise me. It has seemed very much like a sort of pleasant game to me." He laughed. "I kill, quite by accident, the chap that runs your shebang and you all come along and pat me on the back. It's great, I tell you. You haven't been in a German prison pen, Madame. The conversation is hardly worth mentioning, the food is unmentionable and now for the first time in a year I find myself set down in a milieu of beautiful women and clever men with real food to eat and real conversation to listen to, and you, Madame, wish to spoil my evening by speaking of Infernos. It's really not considerate of you."

He lolled lower in his seat and smoked luxuriously, gazing at her through half-closed eyes.

The fingers on his arm tightened.

"I tell you, Monsieur, that you are in great danger, here at this moment. Don't you understand?"

"I understand what you say," he said smiling at her lazily.

"It's the truth--" she repeated. "Danger--of--death--sudden--at any time."

"I am so contented, Madame. I can imagine no moment more agreeable in which to die."

"You anger me. Have you no eyes to see what is going on about you?"

Rowland straightened and glanced carelessly over his shoulder.

"And what is going on about me?" he asked.

"You have become--in a moment--the most important single figure in Europe. You do not believe me. It is true. Around you, here at Nemi, seethes a struggle of nations gasping for breath and you sit and look into my eyes and dream."

"You must blame that upon your eyes," he whispered.

She shrugged, moved impatiently and then after looking cautiously around them into the shrubbery, turned toward him again.

"I pray you to listen to me, Monsieur," she said eagerly. "I like you, Philippe Rowlan'. From the first in there, when I saw you, I knew that I should like you. I don't know why." She shrugged expressively. "You are different. But you are also very foolish and I would not like to see you come to harm."

"And who would harm me?" he said coolly. "Perhaps I am foolish, but you must blame that upon my sense of humor. I blunder into the midst of a pretty little opera-bouffe worthy of the best traditions of Offenbach, with chaps in cowls and cassocks pottering about a saddish-looking tree and muttering about escaping slaves. And you ask me to be afraid. Perhaps when I get through being amused there will be time for that. For the present, Madame, will you bear with me and tell me something about yourself?"

She threw out an arm with a dramatic gesture which showed something of her training. "Ah, I have no patience with you, Philippe Rowlan'," she said, "you are impossible. Think of what I shall tell you, for it is very important. Under the mound below the tree is the treasure-vault of Nemi. It is built of steel, like a bank, and no one may enter it without the secret numbers which open the lock. Those numbers were known only by Kirylo Ivanitch and he is dead."

"That's unfortunate," said Rowland as she paused. "But you can't blame me."

"Do you know what is in that vault, Philippe Rowlan'?" she asked.

"I can't imagine. A pig with a ring in the end of his nose?" he smiled.

"You still disbelieve? Well, I will tell you. The funds of the Order at this time can amount to little less than twenty-five millions of francs. They are there for you or for anyone with imagination to divert into the proper channels."

Rowland's eyes in spite of himself had become a little larger.

"I'm no burglar, Madame. I've done almost everything--but safe cracking is a little out of my line."

"And yet it is upon you that the responsibility for this money devolves. If it is stolen you will be held accountable."

"Stolen! Who will steal it?"

She shrugged. "Who wouldn't--in a righteous cause?" She caught his arm again to emphasize the importance of her words. "To help the cause of Free Institutions in Europe? You! I! Anyone with a cause like that near his heart."

Rowland flicked his cigarette into the bushes. "I am very dense. There seem to be more causes than one at Nemi, more axes than one to grind. Let me be direct," he said coolly. "Yours--Madame Rochal. What is it?" he asked.

She glanced at him swiftly.

"You do not know?"

"Obviously, or I should not be asking."

She paused a moment, looking away from him. And then as though coming to a resolution she turned and spoke in a low tone. "These others believe that I am acting for the Social Democrats of Germany, like Max Liederman, but that is not the case."

"Ah--what then?"

"I am trusting you, Monsieur----"

"By the witchery in your eyes, I swear----"

She paused a moment as though to be sure of her effect. And then in a whisper--

"I am a secret agent of the Provisional Government of Russia."

Rowland sat silent a second and then laid his hand over hers while his lips broke into a boyish smile.

"I knew it, Madame. I was sure of it," he whispered softly. "Our cause is the same. You and I together--what can we not do for Russia and for Freedom."

He was so ingenuous, so boyish, so handsome. His very youth refreshed her. She sighed and then laughed softly as she raised the back of her hand toward his lips.

"There," she murmured, "you may kiss my hand."

But Rowland only glanced at the hand and before Madame Rochal knew what he was about had caught her in his arms and kissed her full upon the lips.

"Monsieur!" she stammered and drew away from him hurriedly. Rowland followed her glance and turned to find Tanya Korasov standing before them. Rowland sprang to his feet and stood, his head bowed, looking indeed rather crest-fallen.

"Mademoiselle----" he began.

But she cut him short with a gesture, speaking rapidly and he saw that she was very pale and suffering under some suppressed agitation.

"Monsieur, you are to come to the house at once. In the name of Freedom--"

Grisha Khodkine demands it!"

"I will go at once."

Tanya had already turned and fled down the path. Rowland had taken only a few paces when Zoya Rochal rushed alongside of him and seized his arm.

"Be watchful, Philippe Rowlan!" she whispered tensely, "for it is he whom you have most to fear."

He laughed softly as he caught her fingers to his lips.

"Thanks, Madame," he said gaily. "No one shall kill me at Nemi but you. That I promise." And left her standing in the darkness.

CHAPTER VII

CAMOUFLAGE

Rowland's long strides overtook Tanya before she reached the lighted spaces of the lawn. He had called to her but she had not stopped and so as he caught up with her he barred her way down the path.

"Mademoiselle Korasov," he blurted out eagerly, "just a word----"

She stopped and faced him, still pale in the moonlight, but quite composed, waiting for him to go on.

"I--I've been placed in a false light--I would like----"

"How, Monsieur?" she said indifferently.

"What you saw, just now--there. Perhaps you think----"

His words stumbled and at last failed completely, for he saw that she was bent on making explanations difficult.

"What does it matter to me," she said, "whom you embrace, and why?"

He felt the sting under her words, and realized that every phrase he uttered only placed him at a greater disadvantage.

"I can make no explanation," he muttered. "If you think me a fool, I'm sorry. And yet I'll prove that your confidence was not misplaced." Another silence during which Tanya walked onward without sign that she heard him.

"Madame Rochal has just confided that she is an agent of the Provisional Government in Russia."

"And you believed her?"

"No. But she believes that I believe her."

"Are you sure?" she shrugged. "You are no match for a woman of her

antecedents----"

"I shall meet her with her own weapons."

"It seems," she said disdainfully, "that you have already begun well."

"Mademoiselle Korasov--enough of this!" he said firmly and after a swift search of a bush nearby again placed himself in the path in front of her so that she couldn't pass him. "You may think me a philanderer if you like, or a fool, if that pleases you better. But the end is worthy of the means. Already I've found out some of the things I wanted to know. The vault beneath the tree will be robbed unless you and I can prevent."

Her eyes flashed with sudden attention. He had arrested her interest at last.

"Ah, you know--?"

He grinned. "I'm in league with both burglars. I've only consulted two. There may be others."

"Zoya Rochal?"

"And Khodkine. I suspect Liederman also."

Tanya stood silent a moment and then a wan smile rewarded him.

"You see? I was right." And then bravely, "This must be prevented, Monsieur."

"Yes. But how?"

"Merely by robbing the vault yourself."

"But I shall need your help, Mademoiselle. This money must be removed for safe keeping until it can be properly used."

"Yes. I can help in that."

"We must waste no time. The sooner the better. Where is the entrance to the vault?"

"An iron door near the wall beyond the mound. I have a key."

"Meet me here then in the shadow of these trees to-night, at one o'clock. Do you agree?"

"Yes," she said after a moment. "I must."

"And do you forgive me for--for----"

She raised her head and looked past him toward the lighted windows.

"What does it matter, Monsieur," she said coldly, "whether I forgive or not? Come." And moving quickly she led the way toward the house while Rowland followed, still certain that however clever he thought himself he felt a good deal of a fool.

Khodkine pacing the floor of his room upstairs awaited Rowland's coming impatiently, but with an effort composed his features in a smile as the American appeared.

"Ah, Monsieur," he said. "It is too bad that I should feel it necessary to interrupt your tête-à-tête with Madame Rochal, who as we all know is the most charming woman in the world. But the President of Nemi is not a free agent.

There are matters requiring your attention in conference with me."

"Of course."

"Then I may go, Monsieur?" asked Tanya from the doorway.

"Yes. Go," said Khodkine with an abstracted wave of his hand and a peremptory tone which made a frown gather at Rowland's brow. Gone were Monsieur Khodkine's soft accents of greeting and his courtly bow. And Tanya seemed in awe of him, her look hanging upon his commands. Rowland remembered the agitation in her manner when she had come to summon him to this conference. Had Khodkine frightened her tonight? And how? Why? Was there something between them, some threat of Russian for Russian, born of politics or intrigue in which Khodkine played the master hand? Or was it something nearer, more personal...? It seemed curious to Rowland that he should be thinking of this for the first time. He had formed his first impression of Tanya there last night in the garden, when clad in her cowl and robes she had seemed so abstracted from the world outside. "A very inferior Mother Superior," as she had called herself, and by this token secluded but very human. He had considered the fact of her extraordinary beauty merely as a fortunate accident, and having dismissed her relations with Ivanitch from his mind, had dismissed all other sentimental possibilities--all, that is, except his own. A love affair--of course. With Khodkine? Perhaps. And yet that would hardly explain the Russian's attitude toward her tonight--or hers toward him. The one thing that seemed to rise uppermost in Rowland's mind was Tanya's fear of Khodkine ... As he joined the Russian at the table by the lamp, he found himself examining Monsieur Khodkine with a new interest and a new antipathy.

"I have here some documents requiring your attention, in order that you may familiarize yourself with the order of business tomorrow when our circle is complete. The report of Herr Liederman from the Socialists of Germany, that of Mademoiselle Colodna from Rome, appeals from Shestov and Barthou. You will read them tonight, Monsieur?"

"Willingly. But this, Monsieur Khodkine, was not why you interrupted my tête-à-tête in the garden," said Rowland slowly. "You had another motive."

Khodkine smiled, got up and shut the door and went on in a low tone. "Why should I not be honest with you? Madame Rochal is not to be trusted, Monsieur. She has already surprised me. She opposed Liederman in accepting you unreservedly as our leader. It was from these two that I had expected resistance. Liederman is a member of the Reichstag. Madame Rochal--?" He shrugged. "If you can tell what she is, you are cleverer than the rest of us. She brings credentials from a central committee in Bavaria, but that means nothing. Such things are arranged. I merely wished to warn you before you had committed yourself to her interests."

"You need have no fear. I've grown my pin feathers. The cause in which we are interested is more important to me than the fascinations of Madame Rochal."

"We understand each other, Monsieur. We are friends. You will help me. I will help you. We shall work together in a harmony that will bring great good to the world. Are you satisfied?"

"Quite."

Khodkine offered his hand and Rowland took it, longing at that moment in a boyish sense of bravado to try grips with the Russian and see which was the better of the two. But his common sense told him that if there were to be a trial of strength between them, it would be a test of mind, of Rowland's cleverness against the Russian's finesse, of the American's skill in dissimulation against Khodkine's skill in intrigue. As yet there was no damage done, and with Tanya's help, Rowland perhaps held the stronger hand.

"To show you the confidence I place in you, Monsieur Rowland, I shall give you this."

And Khodkine, with a deliberateness intended to convey the importance of the matter, took out of his card case a small flat silver disk which he fingered a moment and then handed to Rowland. The American examined it curiously. It bore, in low relief, the double-headed just upon the pedestal in the room downstairs, and below it, the words REX NEMORENSIS.

"A proof of your confidence--Monsieur. What----"

"The talisman of our society. Taken from the watch chain of the dead Priest. Worn only by the Priest but known throughout Europe. Shown to members of our committees, it will carry you safely anywhere."

"Ah, thanks, Monsieur."

"You will forgive me for sending for you, will you not? But it will not do for you to move in the dark. Trust no one but me." He took up the papers on the table and handed them to the American. "Now go to your room, and study these papers carefully with my notes upon the margins, for it is according to this that the council must act tomorrow. But see no one else tonight. Tomorrow morning I will come to your room and tell you of my plan to enter the vault."

"I shall do as you suggest, Monsieur. I am very tired. When I read these papers I shall be ready for a good night of sleep."

"That is well. Good night, Monsieur."

"Good night."

In the seclusion of his room, the Leader of Nemi had much to think of. The labyrinth had grown deeper, its mazes more tortuous, but like Theseus he still held to the silken cord which bound him to Tanya Korasov, and having trusted to his own instincts he was now ready to follow blindly where she led him. But it was clear that Tanya had not under-rated the skill and strength of Monsieur Khod-

kine. He was indeed an adversary worthy of any man's metal. Under his polished veneer, Monsieur Khodkine was made of hardy wood of a fine grain but none the less strong because of that. Though there had been no chance to verify his impressions by a conversation with Tanya, Rowland had decided that Khodkine was working in the interests of Germany for a separate peace with Russia, which would throw all the strength of the German armies upon France, England, Italy and the United States. A mere surmise and based upon the instinct that Tanya was true and a friend of Russia, for which Rowland had fought and was fighting. Without Tanya the whole structure of his intrigue fell to the ground. If he believed that Madame Rochal was an agent of the Provisional Government of Russia, he must also believe that Tanya was plotting against it. And if Madame Rochal were an agent of the Wilhelmstrasse working in the same interests as Monsieur Khodkine, why should the Russian distrust her?

And what was the threat which Khodkine held over Tanya? There seemed no end to the tangle and no course of action but to move softly and await developments. The story of the amount of treasure in the vault below the Tree had opened his eyes. Here, perhaps, was the answer to some of the questions that perplexed him. Politics of the sort that had been disclosed here, would stop at nothing. The times in which he lived made murder a matter of small importance, and what was his own career in France but that of murder highly specialized? Rowland was sure that his own safety now hung upon his continued display of friendship and collaboration in Monsieur Khodkine's plans. And those plans in brief seemed to be nothing less than the looting of the strong-box of Nemi before Madame Rochal or Max Liederman could get at it. And for what Cause? For Germany? Or merely for Grisha Khodkine?

Rowland had no weapons, not even a pocket-knife, and Khodkine carried an automatic in his hip pocket, for Rowland had contrived to brush his arm against it earlier in the evening. The situation was interesting, but hardly to his liking. He longed for a good American Colt revolver, one shot of which, well placed, was worth all the automatics in the world.

But the business before him tonight admitted of no delay nor of any consideration for his own safety. At one o'clock he was to meet Tanya at the lower end of the garden, and with luck, by morning the money and papers in the vault would be well out of harm's way if Tanya could find a place for their safe-keeping. Then, so far as Rowland was concerned, they might dynamite the vault to their heart's content.

"*Droite 72 Gauche 23 Droite 7.*" He had repeated the figures to himself frequently and now continued to do so, taking a new delight in their significance. Twenty-five millions of francs! Five million dollars! They might go far, if properly used, in the interests of the cause he served. Whose money was this? How

long had it accumulated? And what the purpose of those who had contributed? Peace? Surely Peace would come most quickly if Germany were defeated. And was he not the President of Nemi--the chosen of the Council to represent all the members of the society, whether socialists, revolutionists, maximalists, minimalists or what not? The way was difficult. So difficult that there was no arbitrament but the sword. The counter revolutionists of Russia should not betray France, and those who led Russia to destruction under the protection of a fine catchword should not succeed in their treachery if it was in his power to prevent.

Reasoning in this way, Phil Rowland lighted another of the cigarettes of the dead Ivanitch while he scanned the documents entrusted to him by Grisha Khodkine and awaited the hour when he should join Tanya Korasov below in the garden. He had no watch but a clock in the hall downstairs announced the hours slowly. At eleven he blew out his candle and sat in a chair by the window; waiting and listening. It was necessary that Monsieur Khodkine should be disarmed. He heard footsteps in the hall outside from time to time and snored discreetly. He had taken the precaution to fasten the bolt of his door and so feared nothing from the hall. Outside in the garden all was quiet. The moon had set--the moon that had shed its inconstant beams upon his own dissimulation and Zoya Rochal's.... Alluring female, that! The essence of all things enchanting, the woman of thirty, a woman with a past.... A component of faint delightful odors.... Women like that had a way of going to a fellow's head. What the deuce had happened to her after Rowland's sudden exit from the stage she had set for him? He smiled as he remembered the results of his rather violent caress. If Tanya hadn't----

Rowland frowned into the darkness outside. Tanya! He would have given much if Tanya Korasov hadn't come along just at that moment. Women were strange creatures. He had fallen immeasurably in Tanya's eyes, the only ones at Nemi that mattered. He hadn't really wanted to kiss Zoya Rochal. It was merely that her lips were there to take--and he had taken them. He seemed quite sure that Madame Rochal had not been displeased.... And tomorrow he must still play the game.

The clock in the hallway struck the half hour. Half-past twelve. Rowland bent over and took off his shoes and then moved stealthily to the window where he stood behind the curtain peering out into the obscurity of the garden. There was no lantern upon the mound and no dark figure watching by the Tree as there had been last night. Sure that no one was watching outside, he stuck his head and shoulders out of the window and looked around. All the lights were out. He had at first thought of descending from the window which was less hazardous than passing down the corridor and stairs, but remembered that last night after Tanya's warning he had assured himself that there was no means of entrance to his room by the window. The wall below was quite bare of vines or projections

and at least thirty feet high. There was nothing for it but to go by the corridor.

And so with infinite pains to make no sound he slowly moved the bolt of the door until it was drawn entirely back and then waited listening. Silence. He turned the knob cautiously and opened the door. So far so well. After another moment of listening he took up his shoes and on tip-toe went noiselessly down the hallway. The house was as silent as the tomb. If the other members of the Council had any suspicion of one another or of him they gave no sign of it. The house indeed was too quiet--a snore from the door of Monsieur Khodkine would have comforted him.

At the top of the stairway he paused. There was one step that creaked, the tenth from the bottom, he had counted it as he came up tonight. The tenth from the bottom and there were thirty-three in all. The twenty-third then.... He went down carefully until he had counted twenty-two and then with a hand on the balustrade stepped over what he thought would be the offending stair upon the twenty-fourth--when a loud crash seemed to resound from one end of the echoing house to the other. Idiot! Twenty-four of course! He had not counted the top step.

To his own ears, used to the silence of the house, the noise seemed loud enough to have awakened the dead Ivanitch, and he stood listening for a long minute, awaiting the shuffling of feet or the sounds of opening doors above. But nothing happened. The Councilors of Nemi still slept. Rowland grinned. "Fool's luck," he muttered to himself and carefully opening the door into the garden, went out, stealing along the shrubbery past the kitchen, and in a moment had reached the security of the trees. There he stopped to put on his shoes and repeat to himself the numbers of the combination. "72 23 7. *Gauche Droite Gauche*." Or was it *Droite Gauche Droite*? The numbers were right--but the direction--- This was no time to be uncertain in such a matter. That Boche bombing party must have done something queer to his head. No. It was *Droite, Gauche, Droite*--he was sure. Tanya would confirm that perhaps.

He found her in the shadow of the designated trees where she had preceded him by some moments. She wore her cowl and robe from beneath the folds of which she brought forth a revolver which she handed to him.

"You have read my mind, Mademoiselle," he whispered joyfully, "it was this that I wanted the most."

"You heard nothing?"

"No. But one of the steps creaked abominably. And you--have you been here long?"

"No. I came down the back stairs." And then, turning into the shrubbery beside them with no more ado, "Follow me, Monsieur," she said.

Her manner was eloquent of the business they had at hand and reminiscent of nothing personal in their relations. Her thoughtfulness in arming him was

merely a matter of self-protection, her trust in him was a matter of necessity for had she not already given him the numbers of the combination? He followed her quietly. They stole along the outside wall in single file, making a complete detour of the garden until they reached a clump of shrubbery near the spot where Rowland had come over the wall. There they followed a well-worn path into the bushes and were confronted by a mound of earth, in the face of which was an iron door. Here Tanya paused, brought forth a key and in a moment led the way down a flight of steps underground. It was pitch black below but Tanya who seemed to have thought of everything brought out from the folds of her gown an electric pocket lamp which she turned into the passage-way before them, at the end of which Rowland made out a steel door with a shining nickel knob and a handle.

"The vault, Monsieur Rowlan," she said coolly. "It is of American manufacture. Doubtless you are familiar----"

She was looking at him as she spoke, and her eyes for the moment drove all thought of numbers from his head. He caught at her hand.

"Mademoiselle--before we go on, tell me that you've forgiven me. I was but serving your cause----"

She shrugged away from him and flashed the light upon the shining metal knob of the vault door.

"Serve it here, then," she said quickly. "There!--The numbers, *Droite--Gauche*----"

She was quite relentless. He chose to think her repudiation of him the measure of her own purity and with a last look at her fine profile bent forward and fingered the metal knob.

"*Gauche 72*----" he muttered and paused.

"*Droite*, Monsieur!" she said sharply. "Do you mean to say that you have forgotten?"

"If you would be kind to me, Mademoiselle----" he pleaded smiling, "perhaps I could remember better."

"Oh!" she gasped. "This is no time to lose one's wits----"

"You've robbed me of all I ever had----"

"Monsieur Rowlan," she whispered in anguish, "the numbers!"

"Say that you forgive me, Mademoiselle," he pleaded again, turning toward her.

She threw out her arms and the light of the torch went out.

"Mademoiselle," he was whispering. "Forgive----"

The light of the torch flared suddenly, full on his face. She had moved a pace away from him and the cowl had fallen from her head, but her eyes were studying his face intently.

"Forgive!" he repeated, smiling eagerly.

Something in his expression may have satisfied her, for she thrust out her hand to meet his own.

"Yes, yes," she muttered hurriedly. "I forgive." And suddenly switched the light upon the door of the vault. "And now the numbers."

"Ah," he laughed. "I remember them, instantly. *Droite 72, Gauche 23, Droite 7. Droite*. Is it not extraordinary? I cannot do without you, Mademoiselle Tanya--nor you without me. I shall prove it to you. You shall see----"

As she did not reply he relapsed into silence, bending in sudden concentration upon his task. And in a moment, the click of a falling tumbler within the lock announced success. The knob moved no more. Then he took hold of the heavy handle and turned toward the girl with a laugh.

"OPEN, SESAME!" he said. "The Princess Tatyana wishes to enter."

The light wavered as the girl drew back and Rowland saw amazement in her eyes.

"Princess!" she was whispering. "Who told you of my title?"

He stared at her blankly and then her meaning came to him.

"Why, no one, Mademoiselle. The Princess Tatyana is a fairy-friend of my childhood. I dreamed of her as now I dream of you."

She stood puzzled a moment and then switched the light upon the door.

"Open, Monsieur Rowlan!" she said in a half whisper.

He grasped the massive handle in both hands and with an effort, swung the heavy mass of steel outward and the dark entrance to the vault lay open to them.

With no further words, Tanya flashed the light into the interior and quickly entered, while Rowland followed. The place had a musty smell but seemed quite dry, a fact afterwards explained by a double wall and a deep drainage system. The air was close but the electric torch burned brightly, revealing rows of shelves, each carefully lettered, upon which were ancient parchments, discolored and illegible, documents bearing pendant seals, in metal boxes tied with heavy silken cords. There was a grinning skull, a steel casque of the Middle Ages, a spearhead, and an ancient piece of sculpture draped with jewels; upon the floor at the further end bulging leather sacks, and a rack of modern rifles and ammunition. All these Rowland's glance took in at a first look, but his attention was quickly arrested by the actions of Tanya Korasov, who bade him hold the light while she went to a shelf upon the right where her nimble fingers quickly began running over a pile of documents, in modern envelopes, tied with tape. She read the superscriptions eagerly and at last came to the one she sought.

As she did so and took the envelope into her hands a slight gasp of triumph escaped her. Rowland looking over her shoulder read eagerly the fine script.

"*Dossier de Gregory Khodkine*."

And while Rowland's eyes sparkled with this discovery, Tanya without cer-

emony broke the seal and took out the contents, scanning the papers rapidly, smiling and exclaiming by turns.

"His history, here," she whispered over her shoulder to Rowland, indicating the first sheet. "And the evidence--there," pointing to the documents. "It is what I have longed for, for months. Evidence--proof. Look," she said excitedly. "Read. Gregory Hochwald. A commission in the Prussian Guards--1905--signed Wilhelm--1908--appointment to the Staff, 1910--Resignation. Liberal tendencies--(authorized at Potsdam) Russia 1911--Instructions from Graf von Stromberg--1912--(Head of the Secret Service, Monsieur)--Member of the Duma. Other letters of instruction 1913, 1914, 1916,--*since* the war, Monsieur Rowlan'. Is it not damnable?"

"Magnificent," gasped Rowland over her shoulder. "We've got him, Mademoiselle--" and with a grin he paraphrased triumphantly, "where Molly wore her beads."

She glanced at him in a moment of incomprehension, then thrust the papers into their envelope and slipped them into the belt beneath her gown.

"You see, Monsieur," she whispered, "Kirylo Ivanitch was well prepared to deal with this situation. He feared Grisha Khodkine always, but seemed to do as he wished. Now I know why--he was awaiting the overt act which should throw the man into his hands----"

"My heritage," whispered Rowland.

"And mine," said Tanya.

"You've feared him, Mademoiselle. He holds some threat over you. Today--tonight, I saw----"

"I fear him no longer, Monsieur Rowlan'--" she smiled confidently.

"Mademoiselle," said Rowland with boyish eagerness, "if you'll only tell me. Let me help you. I will----"

"No more violence, Monsieur. I shall deal with Grisha Khodkine in my own way."

She took the torch from his hand without a word and led him to a corner of the vault, where upon the lower shelf were a number of packages carefully wrapped in black oil-cloth.

"Bank notes," she said. "Each note of a thousand francs or its equivalent. There are twenty-five thousand of them."

"What shall we do with them? You have a plan?"

The girl nodded.

"It is arranged. We have no time to lose. Picard and Stepan are outside the wall. You will drop them over. I will show you."

And taking up several packages of oil-cloth she bade Rowland hold out his hands while she filled his arms.

"Careful! Each one contains a fortune. Follow me."

She turned toward the door into the passageway, then gasped suddenly and stopped, dropping her torch which clattered upon the steel floor. But in the second before the light was extinguished, Rowland saw that a figure stood at the entrance to the vault, a branch of foliage in one hand while in the other, pointed directly toward him, was a most significant weapon.

CHAPTER VIII

DISASTER

The surprise was so complete that Rowland stood for a moment immovable, staring at the spot in the darkness where Monsieur Khodkine had been, but before he had time to spring aside, there was an explosion and the shock of a sudden impact against him as one of the packages flew from his arms. Close shooting--but he was unhurt and thinking quickly, dropped his bundles, dodged, and drew his revolver, waiting for the next flash of Monsieur Khodkine's weapon.

No sign or sound. Then an anguished gasp from Tanya. "Grisha Khodkine!" she cried. "Don't shoot again. You've killed him."

"Stand aside----"

It was all the mark that Rowland could hope for and he fired low at the sound. A pause of a second and then the bullets from Monsieur Khodkine's automatic crashed all around him. A splinter of wood struck him in the cheek but if Rowland was hit in the body he did not know it and fired rapidly at the flashes until the hammer of his revolver clicked. His weapon was empty as was Khodkine's. Then creeping along the shelves, groping with tense fingers, Rowland made for the spot where the Russian had been. He felt a breath of air from outside through the powder fumes and knew that he had reached the door. His fingers grasped the cold steel of the door jamb, groped across the entrance and--touched an arm. A cry of terror from Tanya as he caught at her fiercely.

"You, Mademoiselle--thank God!" he muttered, and released her.

"He is gone?" she stammered.

The answer came suddenly from behind them within the vault as Khodkine, rushing blindly in the darkness at the sound, brought up against Rowland, who twisted around in his grasp, freeing his right hand, which struck blindly, harmlessly, and then at last found Khodkine's throat.

"Go, Mademoiselle," gasped Rowland. "It--it is better--I will----"

Something told him that Khodkine had another weapon and as he felt the man free his right arm he caught at it desperately, pinioning it to his side. His wrist ... a knife ... everything depended upon the knife.... He released the throat and while blows rained upon his head and shoulders twisted Khodkine's wrist with both hands until he heard the knife go clattering upon the floor.

"Even terms, Monsieur," he gasped, as body to body they swayed from side to side in the darkness.

"You--fool," stammered the other. "To risk--fortune--on this madness----"

"My--risk," grinned Rowland through his blood and sweat.

Rowland, thinking of Tanya and of Germany fought with cool desperation, his arms around Khodkine, crushing, crushing the very breath from his body. The man was weakening. Powerful as he was, his muscles had not been trained as the American's had been in three years of life in the open.

"A truce--Monsieur," Khodkine whispered hoarsely. But Rowland did not hear him and bore him back against the shelves to the left, where their feet stumbled over the pile of packages that Rowland had dropped, and they fell, Rowland uppermost, upon the floor.

All the fight was out of Monsieur Khodkine by this time, and he lay prone while Rowland, the fog of battle still upon him, clutched with his bony fingers even after the man had stopped resisting. It was only when the American realized how tired his fingers were that he sat upon Khodkine's stomach, somewhat bewildered as to what had happened, aware after a moment that his shoulder ached him badly and that his chest burned from his labored breathing, but otherwise that he was quite sound and cheerful.

"Do you give it up, you blighter?" he gasped in English, at last, relapsing into the argot of his platoon of the Legion. "You've got enough?"

A groan from the man beneath was the only reply.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he asked in a moment, in French.

"N--nothing," stammered Khodkine, struggling for his breath. "I--I am vanquished."

The situation was awkward. If Khodkine were strong enough, he might still slip away in the darkness. Rowland was groping about on the floor beside him for a weapon of some sort, when he heard a frightened whisper behind him.

"Monsieur Rowlan--! You are safe?" Tanya was murmuring.

"Yes, thanks. But I'm afraid to get up. Can you find the light here--somewhere on the floor?"

"I'll try, Monsieur," she whispered. And he heard her groping about on her hands and knees among the scattered packages. In a moment she found the torch and threw its blinding glare into the eyes of the antagonists.

She stared at the sight of them, for the splinter wound in Rowland's cheek still bled freely and made dark discolorations upon his clothing and linen. But the American was sitting upon Monsieur Khodkine's stomach, blinking cheerfully at the light.

"You--you're hurt, Monsieur?" she gasped.

"Am I? It can't be serious. I'm feeling quite all right. And you, Monsieur Khodkine? Comfortable?"

The man groaned. "Enough, Monsieur."

Rowland straightened and released his wrists.

"There's about a million francs between his shoulder blades. Come, roll over a bit, Monsieur. The steel floor will be more comfortable."

Khodkine obeyed as Rowland relinquished the pressure, while Tanya stood dumb and motionless, as though the difficulties of their situation had driven her to her wit's ends.

"Let me--let me up, Monsieur," groaned Khodkine.

"Why? So that you can try to murder me again? Hardly. You've broken another Golden Bough----"

"And you--you have vanquished me," muttered Khodkine. "Kill me--or let me go."

Rowland chuckled. "Either alternative is pleasant to me--but one is dangerous."

"I am--am unarmed--also hurt," said Khodkine. "What harm can I do? You--you are stronger than I----"

"No. Merely more in earnest." As the flash-light wavered a moment in Tanya's hands it fell for a second on the rack of rifles. "Ah, Mademoiselle, I have it. If you'll give me the light," said Rowland calmly. And wondering, she handed it to him. "Now, if you please, take a rifle there and load. The clips, I see, are upon the shelf."

While Rowland held the torch, Tanya obeyed quickly and handed the weapon to Rowland, who after examining it and testing it carefully, got quickly to his feet and ordered Khodkine to rise.

"I'm no murderer, Monsieur Khodkine," he said easily, "not in cold blood, at least. And you're quite safe if you remain perfectly still, while Mademoiselle Korasov continues in the task you interrupted."

Khodkine, who had gotten to his feet with an appearance of great difficulty, now stood, quite subdued, still gasping for the breath which Rowland had squeezed out of him.

"Monsieur--" he muttered, his gaze shifting this way and that, "let me speak."

"By all means," said Rowland politely. "If you don't speak too long. We have other business."

"You blame me for--for protecting the Treasury of Nemi. How should I have known that your intentions and Mademoiselle Korasov's were innocent?"

"Merely by our guilelessness, Monsieur Khodkine," grinned Rowland. Khodkine's smile was sickly.

"You are clever," he said. "I have done you an injustice. But why should we quarrel?"

"We won't. Our quarrel is ended. Is that all you want to say?"

"Let us be honest with each other. Our cause is the same----"

"Is it? Then I'm the worst scoundrel unhung. No, Monsieur Khodkine, we shall go our ways, you yours--I mine. And now," with an inclination of the head in excellent imitation of Monsieur Khodkine's satirical amenities, "if you will permit us, Mademoiselle shall continue our interrupted task."

Tanya saw his look of command, and setting the catch on the torch and putting it upon the shelf, and filling her arms with the bundles of bank notes, ran out through the door along the passage.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Khodkine, moving slightly toward the shelf behind him.

"Keep you safe until I can call the Council together." And then, as Khodkine moved another pace. "I would advise you to remain motionless. Another inch backward, Monsieur, and I'll fire."

Khodkine obeyed. The easy manner of the American had deceived him.

"What shall you tell them?" he asked, after a moment.

"That you had planned to rob the vault."

Khodkine laughed.

"This comes ill from you, Monsieur, who were already robbing it."

"No," said Rowland good-naturedly, "we were merely removing the notes to a place of safety."

"Safety! And you think these others will believe you?"

"They will believe Mademoiselle Korasov."

"Ah. Is not my word as good as hers?"

Rowland shrugged. "You're wasting your breath."

Tanya returned at this moment, gathered up more bank notes, and saying nothing, went running down the corridor again.

Khodkine moved his feet a little uneasily but did not move. And his expression which had been shifting through all the phases of uncertainty and apprehension, now broke into a smile.

"Monsieur Rowland, I admire your skill and *sang-froid*. You have a better genius for the game of intrigue than many more experienced. We should be friends, you and I. There is much we might accomplish together."

Rowland laughed and purposely lowered the muzzle of his rifle a few inches.

"Ah, yes, perhaps," he shrugged. He was a little curious for a peep inside Monsieur Khodkine's brain. "What might we accomplish?"

Khodkine's pale eyes examined Rowland narrowly. And after a pause.

"You are an American, a nation which has blundered into European affairs without cause. You, Monsieur, came to fight for France because you were born for the spirit of adventure--because you live upon excitement and have no fear. Is this not so?"

Rowland thought he saw where the fellow was driving but made no reply, for at this moment Tanya came into the room again, loaded her arms and departed.

"That's a correct statement," he smiled. "And I've surely found it here."

He lowered the muzzle of the rifle a few inches more and saw Khodkine's glance follow it.

Khodkine leaned slightly forward.

"You are taking this money to a place of safety, you say. That may or may not be. But you will not succeed in getting it out of Switzerland."

"Why not?"

"Because it is a long way to the French border. You dare not go into Germany. And the arm of Nemi is long."

Rowland looked aghast and the muzzle of the rifle dropped still further.

"I'm not afraid of the arm of Nemi--because," and he laughed, "it's my arm, Monsieur."

Khodkine paused a moment, shrugged his disbelief, and then in a lower tone,

"There is only one person who can help you get this money safely away, Monsieur Rowland," he said.

"And he is----"

"Myself. The German border is less than fifteen kilometers away. Once beyond it, I am safe. See!" And while Rowland watched him closely, he thrust a hand into his pocket and drew out some papers, one of which bore signatures, a photograph and a seal. "My *laissez passer* and yours, Monsieur, if you choose to accompany me."

Rowland's eyes opened wider and his jaw fell. This was the real Khodkine--stripped to the skin that had been born Hochwald. But the American made no reply and waited for the revelation to be complete.

Khodkine wasted no words, and his voice concentrated in a tense whisper.

"The money is negotiable, and will pave a broad highway from here to Holland, if one knows the ropes. You are not a rich man, Monsieur. Nor am I. Think what a great fortune like this means, even to you in America where there are many great fortunes. You will be a prince. I too. We will go together and the world will lie at our feet. Is it not a wonderful picture?"

Rowland heard him through until the end, when the look of astonishment upon his face--indeed more than half real--changed to sterner lines and the muzzle of the rifle slowly came up level with Monsieur Khodkine's breast.

"Why, you d---- rascal!" he growled sternly. "You pig--dog of a thieving Boche!" he repeated deliberately. He paused a moment as Khodkine straightened. "You're a poor conspirator, Herr Lieutenant Gregory Hochwald!" he said with a malicious laugh, as Khodkine gasped. "Hochwald of the Guard!" he repeated, "Prussian Guard 1906--Secret Agent of General von Stromberg--Russian socialist! Bah, Grisha Khodkine. I've got your *dossier*. It's a sweet one."

He paused in some satisfaction at the consternation he had created in the face of Monsieur Khodkine, who was struggling hard to regain his composure.

"My *dossier*, Monsieur!" he stammered, still staring incredulously. "You are mad."

"Not so mad as I seem--nor so guileless--nor so even-tempered, Monsieur Khodkine. I ought to kill you now as you stand and free Nemi of a spy and Russia of a traitor. But I won't. But I'll draw your sting."

And then with a gesture, "March toward the door. Hands up!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Wake Shestov and Barthou--Ah! would you----!"

Rowland fired as Khodkine leaped back, crashing the light to the floor, and turned toward where he had been, firing again at random, cursing himself for his stupidity. The rifle was awkward in the confined space and as he ran in the direction of the door of the vault to head the man off, his foot struck something on the floor and he stumbled against the shelves. When in desperation he found his way to the door of the vault, it clanged shut with a heavy crash, and he heard the tumblers falling into place.

He was locked in, and Khodkine--Khodkine had escaped!

The nature of this disaster did not for a moment occur to him. He hammered on the unresponsive steel for an unreasoning moment, and then stopped to upbraid himself.

"Silly fool," he muttered. "What did you go and do that for? You might have known. You can't shoot, either. H---- of a soldier *you* are!"

Suddenly the terrible meaning of his position began to dawn upon him. The vault closed--with Khodkine outside--and the combination of numbers that opened it unknown to anyone but himself--Unless Tanya--! He put his ear to the steel door and listened. He thought he heard footsteps in the passage-way outside and shouted her name. Silence. The darkness seemed to be closing in on him, like the silence, heavy--oppressive--burdened with meaning.

A tomb! And unless Tanya contrived to find a way to come to his rescue, likely to be his own. And yet how could Tanya---? He dared not follow his

thought to its conclusion. Khodkine would find her there in the darkness and ... Surely he would find her, for she would be coming back to the vault for him. Picard--Stepan! Would they know what to do? And even if they knew what had happened, how would they be able to release him? One by one he thought of the various possibilities and at the last was obliged to dismiss them all. He was caught--like a bear in a trap, and like the bear, raged to and fro for a while, knocking himself and breaking his knuckles against the shelves in the darkness, and cursing his own stupidity, and the wits of Monsieur Khodkine, which after, all had proved cleverer than his own. Khodkine had won--Khodkine, whom not five minutes ago he had been laughing at for his stupidity! Was it only five minutes or was it an hour ago?...

This wouldn't do. No time to be getting "rattled" now. Bad business. Dark as the devil, too, but not hopeless. Nothing was entirely hopeless unless one thought it so. Something might happen. But what? Short of an earthquake that would tear the mound and vault to pieces, there seemed little chance of anything happening except Tanya--and Khodkine would see about her. Rowland was forced to admit that this was a beautiful vengeance for Khodkine to discover, one quite fitting the Boche idea of the eternal fitness of things. To imprison a man, to starve him, to let him beat out his brains in madness against a steel wall, to smother him--

Rowland frowned into the darkness and whistled thinly. To smother him! The phrase seemed to have a new significance, the more terrible because of its simplicity. Suffocation, slow but certain, as he struggled for the exhausted oxygen. A matter of hours. The acid fumes of rifle and pistol smoke still hung in the air--already he seemed to feel that breathing had become difficult....

Imagination! He breathed quite easily and well. What time was it? Something after two, perhaps. He didn't know. What he did know was that he was tired as the devil standing up and that he wanted to sit down somewhere, and have a smoke. He felt in his pockets. Cigarettes of the luckless Ivanitch--and a box of matches. He struck a match and lighted a cigarette. The skull on the shelf grinned at him. "Silly beggar, to grin on and on for a thousand years. Happier though." *He* always grinned when he could. It helped a lot. But he didn't seem to feel like grinning now.

A thought came to him, and striking another match, he found the electric torch upon the steel floor,--smashed this time beyond hope of use. He threw it away from him in disgust and sat down on the hard steel floor, his hands clasped over his knees, gazing at the light of the cigarette. It was a singularly cheerful spot of light in the denseness of the obscurity....

Fool that he was--smoking here, poisoning the little oxygen that was left to him! Angrily he extinguished the cigarette upon the floor--and then clasped his knees with his aching fingers and sat uncomfortably waiting--waiting for what?

A miracle? Could anything be expected of Tanya? And even if she succeeded in eluding Khodkine, how could he hope that she would know the numbers of the combination? He was sure that she had not even committed them to memory. And if she succeeded in reaching Shestov or Barthou and telling them of his predicament, it would take a long while to break into the vault, at the end of which he, Rowland, would be dead of suffocation.

He got to his feet, steadying himself by holding to the shelves. In the darkness it seemed less easy to coordinate the movements of his muscles.... Suffocation must be something like being "gassed"--only less painful. He had seen fellows in the hospitals struggling for their breath and remembered how they looked--livid--green. This was different but it wasn't going to be pleasant. The pounding of his pulses seemed to echo in the still chamber. He moved slowly to one end of the room and reached upward. The ceiling was low, he could touch it easily with his fingers. Stupid to build a vault with a ceiling as low as that.

What time was it? Four o'clock--five? It seemed as though he had lost all notion of the passage of time. Was it daylight outside? He walked around slowly, peering into the corners, seeking a glimpse of daylight which would mean a breath of air for his lungs and a respite at least until starvation came. Everywhere--blackness. The steel of the vault was continuous. Kirylo Ivanitch had planned well.

Poor old Ivanitch. Good sort of a well-meaning lunatic! He was sorry for Ivanitch ... but it hadn't been Rowland's fault. If Ivanitch had only been Khodkine!

Rowland leaned against the gun rack and fingered the muzzles of the rifles. He had wanted to die out there in the open with a weapon in his hand, rushing a trench and yelling *Vive la France*. That was the kind of a death for a good fellow----

Oh, well. He'd had a good time. He had taken his fun where he found it.... But it was rotten luck that he couldn't show Tanya that he had been worthy of her confidence. There was no use crying about it. Somebody might come and let him out. If they didn't this was the end of P. Rowland. He lay flat on the floor where the air seemed very good. Might as well sleep as do anything else. Perhaps tomorrow something would turn up. The ceiling seemed to be closing in on him, like the Pendulum in the Pit. Poe was great on this sort of stuff--but Poe didn't have anything on him.

Once or twice he straightened, thinking that he heard a sound--a dull sound, somewhat like the throbbing of the blood in his ears, only ... Imagination again. He didn't want to think--everything was black--even thought.... He was very drowsy. It wasn't so bad, after all. Tomorrow perhaps Tanya would come.... Princess Tatyana ... Pretty name....

Then suddenly in his dreams the air was riven and his eardrums hurt him horribly as though the blackness in his brain were striving toward the light ...

And then--nothingness.

CHAPTER IX

SURPRISES

Zoya Rochal had watched the figure of Rowland until it disappeared among the shrubbery. Her brows were slightly drawn and her eyes, shadowed by her dark hair, peered eagerly into the half light of the garden. Monsieur Khodkine, it seemed, respected her intelligence. But it was a pity that he had sent out for Monsieur Rowland so soon. It would have required but ten minutes more to have hitched this handsome American to her chariot wheel. He was a nice boy and it would be a pity if anything happened to him, for it seemed quite certain that something was on the point of happening at Nemi, and whatever happened it was Monsieur Rowland who would be the loser. Against the will of Max Liederman she had chosen to throw her lot in with the new President of Nemi, because he seemed quite young, quite inexperienced and with good management could be made quite useful for her own ends. But she hadn't reckoned upon the speed of Monsieur Rowland's wooing and the sudden culmination of the adventure. She wasn't sure that she hadn't liked the spontaneity of his caress--hurried, boyish and quite ingenuous. She must do what she could to save this newly found admirer from the wiles of Monsieur Khodkine, and with this object in her general plan, she moved slowly in the direction of the house and encountered on her way Max Liederman, walking alone in a bypath and furiously smoking a long cigar.

"Ach, Madame," he growled. "So you've at last condescended. It's time----"

"Don't be a beast, Max," she said coolly.

"Well, this is no time for trifling," he growled.

"Sh!" she warned. "I'm not trifling. I've wasted no time. I've learned what I wanted to find out. Monsieur Rowland knows nothing."

"Does he look as if he knew anything?" he said contemptuously. "I could have told you that much. Khodkine twists him around his thumb."

"And so do I."

"Ach--and at what cost?" he muttered suspiciously.

Madame Rochal smiled up at Khodkine's lighted window.

"That's my affair," she said coldly.

"And in the meanwhile," he went on, "this precious Khodkine will get into

the vault. Tonight, perhaps--How do I know that even now he hasn't the combination to the doors in his pockets. And I don't trust Fräulein Korasov."

"Nor I. She is much too quiet."

Liederman threw his cigar into the bushes, thrust his fists into his trouser pockets and swayed heavily from one foot to the other.

"Zoya Rochal," he said hoarsely, "you see how things are here at Nemi. While Ivanitch led our committee we were sure at least of a man pledged deeply to Internationalism and the socialist cause. It was his fetish. He was orthodox. He even gave his life for his convictions. And now whom do we find as Priest of Nemi--a friend of France, full of meaningless catchwords about Peace and Liberty--a boy from America, now the enemy of my country, ready to be caught by the first wind that blows. You, Zoya, voted for him. You have placed yourself on his side,--why, God knows, when with Khodkine he may work our ruin."

"Nonsense."

"I know what I am talking about. Khodkine comes with credentials from Russia, but that means nothing. You carry credentials from the Central Committee of Munich. He may be a Russian or a Roumanian, an Austrian or an agent of the Wilhelmstrasse----"

"That is not possible. I know----"

"What difference does it make to me? I distrust him. You may turn hither and yon for advisers, but no one may say that I'm not loyal to those who sent me here. In Germany I was born and bred, but the cause I serve is greater than nationality, greater than patriotism. And whatever others may do I am ready to give my life for that cause."

Zoya Rochal smiled at him charmingly and laid her slim fingers along his hairy cheek and their touch seemed to quiet him.

"No one doubts your honesty, my great bear," she said with a laugh. "You may not always be pleasant, but you always have the courage of conviction."

"And what thanks do I get?" he growled.

"Mine," she whispered, running a hand through his arm.

"Bah!" he shrugged.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"Nothing, except not to play with fire."

"You've planned something?"

"Yes," he growled. "And I'm going to do it, to-night."

She turned up toward him in eager inquiry.

"What?"

"I'm going to take no further chances with this situation."

"Are you serious?"

"Am I ever anything else? The money in the vault belongs to the Society

of Nemi and the essence of the Society of Nemi--is Socialism. While I live, that money shall be spent in no other service."

"That is right, but you're not sure----"

"I trust no one here. And as the Council stands I can be out-voted. Shestov, Barthou, Colodna, Khodkine--and this young sprig of a Yankee. And the others---? We can't be sure of them. Most of this money should be appropriated for immediate use tomorrow, in Germany, in Austria, in Russia and Italy. And yet what assurances have we that it will not be wrongly used even, if used at all--or that Monsieur Khodkine this very night may not make away with it."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Take it, tonight--myself."

"You----!"

Max Liederman shook his massive shoulders and tapped her with a kind of elephantine playfulness upon the hands.

"Did you ever know me to make a boast that I couldn't fulfill?" Then in a hoarse whisper. "I'm going to break into the vault."

"You are prepared?"

"Yes. I've been prepared for a long time. I always believe in being ready for emergencies."

"Do you need my help----"

"Your society, *chère* Zoya, let us say----"

"When will you do this?"

"Toward morning. I have a drill and explosives. With luck I should succeed in something over an hour."

"And the money? Where shall you take it?" Zoya asked.

"Away from here to a safer place. Will you go with me?"

"Suppose you fail?"

He smiled grimly. "I won't fail. There's no watch kept upon the Tree. Will you meet me here?"

"At what hour?"

"At three. It is the hour of deepest slumber. Your room adjoins mine upon the other side of the house. You must sleep soundly, for we may have to travel far."

Madame Rochal stood in a moment of silence and then assented.

"I see I've not put my faith in you for nothing, Max," she said quietly.

"I've told you," he muttered, "that I've always been worth considering. You shall see---- Will you kiss me, Zoya?"

She made a little *moûe* at him and then obeyed with the deftness of one skilled in illusions.

"There, my great bear," she laughed. "And you'll wake me?"

"Yes. Now go and get your beauty sleep."

"And you? Shall you stay awake?"

"I sleep with one eye open--I can wake when I please. Borrow no trouble on that score."

She moved toward the house, whispering to him:

"Remain here. It will not do for us to be seen together. *Au revoir*." And blowing a kiss at him with her fingers, she floated away into the shadows.

Max Liederman was thorough. With characteristic prevision he had prepared all things, including a machine which was to be waiting at daylight outside the wall. Three o'clock found them at the iron door which led down into the passage. Liederman had been prepared to force this lock and to his amazement, and Zoya Rochal's, the key was in the door, which indeed was partly open.

Liederman stopped a moment to rock to and fro and gaze at the door in a puzzled way.

"Curious," he muttered, rubbing his head.

"Some one has been here before us?" questioned Zoya.

He nodded. "It looks so," he growled, "but we'll soon find out." Entering without hesitation and carrying his tools in their canvas wrapping, he threw the light of his pocket-torch down the steps and descended, while Zoya Rochal, her small nose sniffing the air daintily, followed, frowning.

"Don't you smell something?" she whispered when they reached the passage.

"I fancied--yes, I'm sure--the fumes of powder."

"Ah, I was not mistaken then. What can have happened?"

"I don't know. Perhaps we are mistaken."

Zoya, whose eyes seemed to be keener than his, suddenly darted forward ahead of him with a cry, and bending down beside the steel door picked up something and held it before Max Liederman's eyes.

"The Bough!" she cried. "The Golden Bough!"

Liederman started upright, his eyes big as saucers under his tangled brows.

"Khodkine!" he stammered. "Here!"

"It's quite green," she whispered. "Recently broken."

"He has killed--Monsieur----" she halted, her face white as paper.

"Your little Yankee--!" He shrugged uneasily. "Perhaps. Wait. I must see."

He bent forward with the lamp and examined the nickel knob and handle, turned the light down, then went upon his knees and put his face close to the stone floor.

"There are many footprints in the dust,--one small, one with high heels, Zoya."

"Tanya Korasov?"

"Who else?"

"She and Khodkine--but I don't understand----"

Max Liederman had settled down before the door of the vault with a business-like air, unwrapping the canvas covering of his tools, and examining the knob, listening intently. Then he threw off his coat and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt and set to work while Zoya, her hand trembling, held the light.

"Could they have killed him--do you think?" she asked again anxiously.

"How should I know? It would only be what he deserves," he grunted.

Zoya's dark eyes frowned at him, but she said nothing.

Meanwhile the drill was slowly eating its way into the steel door above the lock. She questioned again but he was intent upon his task and made no answer. The sweat stood out in beads upon his face and fell to the ground. He was a magnificent brute. There were women who ... But Zoya Rochal was difficult to please.

The first glimmerings of the dawn were filtering down through the iron door at the end of the passage before Max Liederman announced that his work was completed. Then he attached the fuse and he and Zoya Rochal went up the stairs, closed the iron door and waited.

A muffled explosion as the iron door swung open and a cloud of dust enveloped them. Liederman darted down the steps with Zoya at his heels. The charge had been cleverly placed and by the use of an iron rod and a short steel jimmy, at last the door of the vault yielded to Liederman's weight and swung inward upon its hinges.

Liederman threw the light into the room and it gleamed upon the swirling dust which for a moment obscured the vision. But as the cloud cleared, they saw a litter of papers upon the floor, and in the midst of the wreckage the figure of Rowland lying prone, his arms outstretched, smeared with blood and grime. A hasty glance around the shelves revealed no trace of the treasure of Nemi.

Liederman rocked to and fro in an awful moment of silent imprecation.

"*Schwein-hund* that I am, for waiting," he muttered. "Khodkine has been here before us."

Zoya Rochal gazed at him wildly a moment, and then fell to her knees beside the prostrate figure upon the floor.

Liederman grunted incuriously.

"He's dead?" he asked.

"Yes--No! His heart beats----"

"Ach--we must get him out of this--into the air. Pfui! It is enough to stifle one. Can you help, Zoya? His feet----"

Max Liederman raised the prostrate man and between them, they half dragged, half carried him out along the corridor and up the steps into the air.

Without waiting for instructions Zoya ran to the house and came back with water and brandy. By the time she returned Liederman had loosened the American's collar, and after a while, in response to treatment, Rowland moved slightly and opened his eyes. He turned his head from side to side, gazing up through the trees at the spreading dawn and then his look met Zoya Rochal's. He concentrated his gaze with some difficulty as though not sure of himself, and then with an effort raised himself upon one elbow, his hand to his brows in a moment of thought.

"Khodkine!" he muttered weakly in English. "And the--the blighter--got--got away with it."

"Khodkine--yes-----" uttered Liederman.

Rowland grinned up at his interrogator and nodded.

"Gone--got the best of me----"

"With the money? And Mademoiselle Korasov----?" questioned Liederman keenly.

Rowland brushed a hand across his brow and started upright.

"Mademoiselle Korasov! Yes. Yes----"

"They've robbed the vault, I tell you," cried Liederman wildly. "The money is gone----!"

It was here that Zoya Rochal took command of the situation.

"We can do nothing alone. Go, Max, arouse Shestov, Barthou and Signorina Colodna. They must learn of this."

"I'm quite all right," muttered Rowland. "Only a little confused. There was an explosion."

She gave him another drink of the brandy which he accepted gratefully.

"You are very kind, Madame," he said.

Zoya Rochal regarded him in a moment of anxiety.

"I warned you, Philippe Rowlan," she said.

He smiled at her broadly and then whispered quizzically, "There was a pig in the vault," he laughed. "The trouble was that he hadn't any ring in his nose."

"It is no time to jest, Monsieur. I'm afraid you're badly hurt."

"I'm all right," he smiled, "but nitro-glycerine is not the best thing for a headache."

"I'm sorry, Monsieur." He saw Madame Rochal start and put her finger to her lips. "Sh--," she whispered and peered out from behind the bush where Rowland was sitting, toward the wall. He got up to his knees and followed her glance. It was still quite dark, but in the growing light he saw a movement in the branches of a tree near by and presently made out a pair of legs, dangling above the top of the wall. "It's a man," whispered Madame Rochal, "coming over. What----?"

Rowland slowly got to his feet and stood, his hand in warning on the arm of Madame Rochal, waiting until the man should descend. The gray figure hovered

for a moment on the top of the wall and then they heard the thud of his boots as he reached the ground. In a moment, as the man emerged from the bushes, Rowland sprang out and faced the intruder. And as each man recognized the other in the growing light, he stepped back, the one in, surprise, the other in consternation.

"Picard----!"

"You, Monsieur Rowland! Safe!" He breathed hard like one in the last stages of exhaustion.

"Quite, as you see. Mademoiselle Korasov sent you?"

Picard gasped and nodded. "With this note to Monsieur Shestov."

"Let me see it."

While Zoya Rochal turned on the light of Liederman's torch Rowland unfolded the slip of paper covered with close writing--in Russian.

"The devil!" cried the American. "Madame Rochal--read!"

Zoya Rochal obeyed, translating rapidly.

"Ivan Shestov,

The American Rowland, imprisoned in vault. He will die unless door is forced. Lose no time. I am prisoner of Gregory Khodkine fleeing with bank notes into Germany by upper road--a machine--destination--Munich. Follow.

Tatyana."

As she finished, Rowland turned quickly to Picard.

"And Stepan----?"

"Dead, Monsieur. He resisted. Mademoiselle warned me. I obeyed Monsieur Khodkine until the time came, when I took this paper and fled. I have been running for two hours."

"You have done well, my friend. We shall lose no time. But how was Stepan killed?"

"Monsieur Khodkine said that he had broken the Golden Bough--that you, Monsieur Rowland, were killed and that he was the Priest of Nemi. We did not believe him. He ordered Stepan to carry the bank notes--which were already in the suit-case--along the road. Stepan refused to obey and Monsieur Khodkine struck him in the head with a stick. His body is near the road only a hundred yards or so from the wall."

"And you----?"

"Mademoiselle had whispered, 'Do nothing! Obey!' And I went with them, carrying the suit-case until we came to an empty machine standing by the roadside----"

"Liederman's----" explained Zoya Rochal.

"I see," muttered Rowland. And then, to Picard, "They had passed the German border when you returned?"

"Yes, Monsieur--a matter of three or four miles perhaps. The machine

slowed down upon a hill and I slipped out and ran into a wood, coming back as fast as I could run."

"You saw no one?" asked Zoya Rochal.

"No, Madame. I knew where the sentries were stationed on the frontier and avoided them."

Shestov and Barthou now came with Liederman, drawing on clothing as they ran, their faces wan in the growing light as the details of the situation were explained to them.

"Your note, Monsieur Shestov," said Rowland coolly, handing it to him. "We took the liberty of reading it, As you will see, there's little time to lose."

The tall Russian frowned as he read while the impatient Barthou questioned anxiously.

"But I can't understand how Herr Liederman----"

Zoya Rochal cut him short.

"I heard the sounds of shots and called Herr Liederman," she explained glibly. "We went to the vault which showed signs of having been tampered with. And so with a crow-bar which Monsieur Khodkine had left, we broke into it. Is this not so, Monsieur Rowland?" she challenged him.

Their glances met in comprehension. Rowland turned aside.

"That is true," he said coolly. "Monsieur Khodkine was robbing the vault. I interfered. We fought but he outwitted me and got away----"

"But I don't understand----" persisted Barthou.

"Monsieur," cut in Rowland quickly, "there is no time for explanations. The bank-notes of Nemi are in a machine bound for the interior of Germany. Some of us must follow at once. A machine----"

"Mine is in the village," said Zoya.

"Passports----"

"Mine----" cried Liederman.

"And Monsieur Rowland----?" questioned Zoya.

"I shall take my chances. We must go at once."

CHAPTER X

FLIGHT

Monsieur Khodrine drove steadily into the gray light of the new day, satisfied with

the events of the night which had resulted quite miraculously to his advantage, for the suit-case containing the bank notes of Nemi was safe upon the floor of the tonneau and the Princess Tatyana, still clad in her dark robe, sat in the seat beside him, completely at his orders. The escape of Picard had annoyed him, for he had intended taking the man far into the interior of Germany and there turning him over to the authorities as an alien enemy and a prisoner. But in the present turn of affairs it was possible that the counselors of Nemi might be put upon his own tracks and the pig of a Yankee liberated from the vault. He had been imprudent when in the first flush of his success he had told Tanya of their destination, but the chances of Picard getting back safely were not great, and he knew nothing of value.

The way in which the American Rowland had hidden his hand and almost defeated Monsieur Khodkine's projects showed how easily one could be mistaken in appearances and the feeling of comfort that had followed the imprisonment of the Yankee intruder in the vault was now slowly giving way to a vague inquietude. For the arm of Nemi, as Khodkine himself had said, was long and if Max Liederman blew open the door of the vault before the air for Rowland's cursed lungs was exhausted, Khodkine would have the whole pack of them yelping at his heels before he could take himself and the money to cover.

It was gratifying to him to turn his head and see the handsome angry profile of the Princess Tatyana there just beside him, but in spite of the way in which fortune had played into his hands and the ease with which her abduction had been accomplished, there were many thoughts that bothered him and her uncompromising attitude of enmity made him aware that he must play his game with a gentle hand. He had held her, heretofore, by the threat which he had hung over her,--a painful business at best, since she was quite the most desirable woman he had ever known. But the pig Rowland had startled him by revealing a knowledge of his nationality, his correct name, regiment and employment. For if Rowland knew who he was, from whom had he received the information? Not from Zoya Rochal, for that lady, clever as she was, could have had no possible means of learning the truth. Not from Liederman nor Barthou nor Shestov, for he had covered his trail far too cleverly. He was not so sure that Kirylo Ivanitch had not discovered something--Kirylo! Had Tatyana gotten something from the dead priest and told what she had learned to Rowland?

And so, driving silently, Monsieur Khodkine tried to think out a solution of his problems, mindful of the girl at his side, who sat rigidly in resolute silence, deaf or oblivious to the small attentions which he offered her. But as the day had now broken and the roads had suddenly seemed to fill with people, some of whom stared at the dark, cowed figure, he turned to her with a smile.

"They think, Princess Samarov," he said, "that I'm eloping with a nun."

She made no reply.

"If it pleases you, Princess Samarov, we will descend at Tuttlingen."

She understood the meaning of the repetition of her name, but gave no sign that she was aware of it.

"Of course, Gregory Khodkine," she replied coldly, "I must do as you wish."

"Ah, my dear Tatyana," he urged, "do not say that. Rather tell me that you wish it also."

"I wish for nothing but my freedom."

He smiled at her pleasantly.

"How like a woman," he said, "to desire the one thing not in my power to grant. I cannot let you go. And if I did, here in Germany, your position would be precarious." He drove on in a moment of silence and then spoke more soberly. "Come. Be reasonable. Through no fault of my own we are enemies. It is very painful to me to feel that you are not in sympathy with my aims for Russia, but the very fact that I am right and you are wrong, makes me more generous toward you."

"Generous! Is this generosity----?"

"One moment, Princess Tatyana," he broke in as she paused. "You cannot forget, nor can I, that no matter what has passed between us, you had no right to condemn me unheard for what happened in Moscow. Prince Samaroff brought his fate upon himself. Nor had you the right to confide, without the consent of the Council of Nemi, in this absurd adventurer from America, to set him against the established authority, furnish him with the combination of the door which protected the money of the society that he might loot the vault for his own uses----"

"That is a lie," she muttered tensely.

He shrugged.

"The evidence is all against him--and you, Princess Samarov," he added quietly.

She faced him and in the abrupt action the cowl fell over her shoulders, disclosing her disordered hair.

"You dare not look me in the eyes and say that I would steal money given in a holy cause. You dare not!" she murmured bravely.

He drove on stolidly for a moment and then a smile came on his thin lips.

"Much as I would like to look in your eyes, Princess, it is now impossible, since I would surely run into a market-cart. It is difficult furthermore," he said coolly, "because to look into your eyes is dangerous to my peace of mind----"

"Tch!--" The accent of scorn in her voice was very genuine, as she twisted away from him. "You honor me, Gregory Khodkine," she finished.

"I would honor you more, Tatyana Samarov--the highest honor in the priv-

ilege of any man to bestow," he said quietly. "I ask you to be my wife."

She was startled and turned toward him, wide-eyed.

"You!--after what you have done to me and mine----!"

"I beseech you to listen to me. Your father, Prince Samarov, was the enemy of Russia's freedom----"

"Because he believed in order," she broke in wildly, "instead of anarchy----"

"Because he was reactionary--" he paused with some show of delicacy, "because he was a traitor to the very causes you represent."

"That is not true. His cause is mine--the integrity of Russia as well as her freedom."

Khodkine smiled lightly.

"The old order passeth, Princess, and with it those who are not awake to the new issues."

"And what is the new order of things?" She returned with spirit. "A carefully planned disorder that Germany may triumph, a chase of will-o'-the-wisps through a mist of illusions. *You* speak of treachery; *You*----!" She stifled the scorn of her tongue with an effort, for the thought of the papers in her bodice warned her that she was coming to dangerous ground.

"You are trying to do me injustice, Princess," he said quietly, "but your very words fail you for lack of proof. That it was through my agency that Prince Samarov was thrown into prison is indeed a proof of my loyalty--for did I not know that in condemning him--" Khodkine's voice sank a note as he finished slowly, "that in condemning him I was losing my own heart's desire--the one woman in the world that I have ever loved--or can."

She glanced at him quickly but anger dominated.

"He was innocent of any connection with the *Camarilla* of Rasputin," she said in a tense voice. "He despised trickery--and you knew it."

"That will doubtless be proved, Princess Tatyana, and it may be that I can help," he said suavely. "Indeed I am not without influence with the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies."

"And why should you not be--you who are----!"

Again she paused, her hand below her cassock fingering the *dossier* of Gregory Hochwald.

"I am--what, Tatyana?" he asked keenly.

She shrugged and looked away.

"The apostle of--of license!" she said chokingly.

The promptness of her reply reassured him. She believed in the Provisional Government and the dangers that now beset it were very real to her.

He smiled and turned to her softly.

"Aren't your mission and mine the same, after all? We desire a Russia free--

-not alone from medievalism but from the traitors within her borders who have stolen the food from her soldiers, profited upon munitions which never reached those who upheld the honor of Russia at the front--the capitalists and those they put in power. I need not go on. You know their names and places--vipers that any true Russian of the nobility or of the people should pledge his life to crush. You too, Tatyana--you are their enemy as I am. Will you deny it?"

Tanya had listened in silence, amazed at the fervor of his denunciation and at his plausibility. Had she not held close against her body the proofs of his perfidy, had she not known the secrets of his Russian intrigue, his clever tongue might have persuaded her. As it was, having in her misery already planned a course of action, she merely answered evasively. Gregory Khodkine should be no more clever than she. At the present moment she seemed to be completely in his power, and until a proper opportunity presented, she must meet him at his own game. This was not the first time he had declared his love for her. There had been other moments in Petrograd and at Nemi when Gregory Khodkine had chosen to dignify her with his attentions, but beneath his suave demonstrations of affection, she had always been sure of his venality and felt the threat of a danger. Her father at this moment lay in a cell in the Prison of St. Peter and St. Paul, a prisoner through this man's agency, and of those others who had sworn falsely. She had blamed Gregory Khodkine, because she had guessed that the currents which actuated him had their source among the high places. Now she knew what and where, for the proof was in her possession, and that knowledge made her fear and hate him the more.

The disaster to Monsieur Rowland had stricken her helpless, the death of Stepan had terrified her, but she had managed to gather her wits together in time to feign illness and write the note to Shestov which Picard had taken. All her hopes lay in Picard. Would he reach Nemi in safety and if so would he be in time to save Monsieur Rowland from a frightful death? Monsieur Rowland was a brave man. There was a quality of carelessness in his courage and ingenuity that had made her throw herself impulsively into his confidences and upon his protection. It was incredible that this fine young life should be snuffed out.... She would not believe it! And Monsieur Khodkine, Rowland's enemy, Stepan's slayer, sat beside her, driving into the sunshine of the dewy morning, alive, awake, persistent and successful, a portent of the triumph of the dark forces which were spreading their evil snares all about the world. She stole a quick sidelong glance at him and marked the handsome, finely-cut profile. He was good to look at--but cold--so ruthless and so cold! And it was this man who a moment ago had asked her to marry him! There had seemed something more ominous to her in the carefully chosen words of his declaration than there would have been in the rugged orders of an honest jailor. And yet there was too something in the quietness of his man-

ner and in the air of submissiveness with which he had accepted her rebuff which reassured her. Could it be, after all, that under this impassive exterior there was a soul that could be touched, a chord of memory, an ideal to be invoked, in which during moments not given to the soulless pursuit of a mad nation's ambitions, she, Tanya, could have a part? Once or twice she had believed him genuine, for in his pale blue eyes had come a look that had been born of a real emotion, and then something had happened--a quick return of his imperiousness or suspicion, which had driven from her mind all thoughts except that this was the man who held the fate of Prince Samarov in the hollow of his hand. But what if...

She glanced at him again. His position was unchanged, his expression unmoved, sober, determined but not unpleasant, and for the present he seemed to have forgotten her existence. Love? To such a man--it was a thing apart, a trifle, an incident upon the highway of his life and yet--what if she could find it--use it?

There was a weapon here for her woman's fingers to grasp and wield. He had offered it to her. Was that too a part of the tissue of falsehoods he had woven about his life or was it a tangible thing that would cut and rend as a woman's weapons should? There was nothing left for her but to choose. Timidly, but firmly she caught at it.

"Grisha Khodkine," she said with a smile that belied the fear in her heart, "perhaps you are right. I am only a woman. I have thought deeply and sorrowed deeply for Russia, but that is a woman's weakness for her heart leads her always. As to my father----"

She paused and looked over the blue valley which led down to Lake Constance.

"He need not worry you," he broke in. "Before leaving Petrograd, I assured myself that he lacked nothing. He is comfortable, well-fed and in no danger. If you will trust in me, it will not be long before all your clouds are rolled away."

"I--I do not believe you, Grisha Khodkine," she murmured. "One does not change one's thoughts at the first wind that blows. You are catering to a maddened people drunk with liberty. That is dangerous and bodes no good to my country--and--and yours."

"And yet the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies is to rule all Russia. You shall see. Out of chaos, cosmos shall come, a government 'of the people, for the people, by the people.'"

She shook her head and spoke quickly.

"Nothing can come out of chaos but the chaotic. You see I can not believe in you."

"That is a pity, Princess Tatyana," he said quietly. "But one day you will learn that I have spoken the truth."

She was silent a moment and then she spoke, trying to measure her words

which came hotly in spite of herself.

"What have you done to make me believe in you? What does this flight into Germany mean? These passports--which permit you, who call yourself a loyal Russian, to go into the very heart of your enemy's country without hindrance, without question? And by what right do you carry me against my will to this central committee of Munich, which represents a socialism tainted with the poisons of Potsdam----?"

"I would suggest caution, Prince Tatyana," he interrupted sharply. "You are now in Germany and presently may be placed in a position where such a remark if overheard would put you in great danger."

"The daughter of Prince Samarov is not afraid," she said scornfully.

"Then I shall be afraid for you and protect you in spite of yourself."

Her growing anger had driven prudence to the winds.

"I am no puppet, Gregory Khodkine, to be carried here and there against my will. By what right have you dared do this thing----?"

"By right--of might," he said quietly, "the force that sways Russia and will sway the world." The car had reached a deserted strip of the road and Khodkine drove more slowly. "Listen, Tatyana. Perhaps you did not believe me a while ago when I told you what was in my heart. That is your privilege. But it is mine to serve--and wait----"

"Serve!"

"Let me finish. Perhaps I can make my purposes clearer to you. You believe that I have stolen this money, for some personal or political object. That is not true. It goes to a place of safety, where you as well as I will have some say in its disposition in international affairs. You chose to be suspicious of me and to take into your confidence this mad American, but he did not foresee, nor did you, that there were other forces at work which threatened the Society of Nemi--Ah! You are interested! It is the truth."

"Max Liederman!"

He nodded. "And you know what that meant?"

"Zoya Rochal."

"Exactly! You are clever, Princess Tatyana. Herr Liederman would have wasted no time. I know. I have evidence. He was prepared for the death of Kirylo Ivanitch. He meant that the bank notes should fall into no other hands but his."

"But Herr Liederman, whatever his deficiencies, is at least honest in his convictions and in his allegiance."

Khodkine laughed lightly.

"The convictions, the allegiances of a dotard who is in love with a dangerous woman are no more to be relied upon than the woman herself. Zoya Rochal has owned many men and used their fortunes. She is without an occupation.

Herr Liederman is not prepossessing, but in her eyes twenty-five million of francs would beautify Pluto himself. And Herr Liederman----"

He shrugged expressively and finished with a smile.

"Herr Liederman would never have carried out his good intentions."

And then as she made no reply,

"So you see why I have acted quickly. Monsieur Rowland is clever, but the Gods serve the righteous. I brought you with me, Princess, because it was impossible to do otherwise. The judgment of a woman is not always to be relied upon. You are out of harm's way. I shall save you from mischief and from others who might do you and the cause I serve incalculable harm. I pray that you will do me the justice of believing in the honesty of my motives."

Under her robe her fingers clutched the *dossier* of Gregory Hochwald.

"Honesty is as honesty does. The passports, Monsieur--to me they can mean but one thing."

"Two things, Princess," he said with a laugh. "I am either a spy of Germany in Russia or a spy of Russia in Germany. Can you choose?"

His impudence amazed her.

"A spy--of Russia!"

It was time that she moved carefully, for the slightest slip might betray her. "Oh," she said carelessly, "I had not thought of that."

"I am not without friends in Germany," he went on--"in Prussia. I was educated in a German university. If I have used my connections in Russia's services, how can you blame me?"

She made no reply.

"Does that explain any facts--or help you to understand?" he asked.

"I think--perhaps," she said slowly, "that it does."

He examined her keenly for a moment.

"You suspected--you had heard that I was acting in the interests of Prussia? Did Ivanitch speak of me to you?"

"Oh, no," she said, turning and looking steadily into his eyes. "I was not the confidante of Kirylo Ivanitch in such matters." She broke off and turned away with a shrug.

"My doubts as to your genuineness are purely personal--and based, you must admit, upon good grounds. In the twentieth century abduction is hardly conventional. Women no longer kiss the hands that beat them, Gregory Khodkine."

He was silent for a long moment of meditation.

"It is very painful to me that you should dislike me so much. I ask nothing of you--expect nothing. For while I can help the cause of free Russia, I have sworn that no personal consideration shall stand in the way of duty. It is the irony of

fate that it should be you, Princess Tatyana, who are thrown across my path, but that has made no difference to me. My life or happiness is nothing beside the other issue. That day at the British Embassy when we met and afterwards walked along the river, our minds struck fire. I knew then that you were different from other Russian women of your class. I am not sentimental--perhaps you think me cold; but I love you, Tatyana, and whether you believe it or not will serve and protect----

"Please, Grisha Khodkine," she murmured. "My situation is delicate enough, without making it more difficult."

They were approaching the town and Monsieur Khodkine drove more carefully.

"It shall be as you please," he said quietly. "My desire was to reassure you. You shall be as safe in my company as you are at Nemi, but I pray you to be discreet. One may not speak freely in Germany in times like these. I warn you now that for myself I fear nothing, so that you are powerless against me, but should you antagonize or deride German authority, I may not be able to save you."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Keep silent, that is all. You travel as my sister. At the town ahead of us you will provide yourself with a valise, a hat, coat, and such toilet articles as you may require. Tonight we should reach Munich where you will be again among members of the society. I shall try my case before them, place this money in their care."

"And after that--what?"

"If it pleases you, we shall go on into Russia."

She thought a moment. "And if I promise to obey you thus far, what do you offer me in return?"

"The liberation of Prince Samarov when we reach Petrograd," he replied promptly.

"Very well," she assented at last. "I agree."

"Good," and then with a smile; "one word more, Princess Tatyana, a word of warning and of prophecy. The cause of the Provisional Government is hopeless, its leaders dreamers--idealists. Russia has dreamed too long. The party to come into power will be radical, applying desperate remedies to desperate diseases, but it will be practical and it will be triumphant. Do not sink with a lost cause--for in the end the result is the same--Russia free--socialism--Internationalism victorious--"

"International Prussianism----!"

He frowned slightly--

"You are already breaking your agreement--"

"And England, France, Italy--" she persisted eagerly. "What becomes of our agreements with them?"

He shut his jaws grimly.

"They must look out for themselves, Princess Tatyana," he finished.

"Ah!" she gasped, and sinking back into her seat, said no more.

CHAPTER XI

THE PLOT

The car drew up at the door of a store the sign upon which proclaimed the sale of articles of feminine apparel and Khodkine got out and stood bowing upon the pavement.

"A suit-case, a hat, gloves and coat and such other articles as you require. Let me know the cost and I will give you money. And remember our agreement. I will await you here."

She had slipped out of her dark robe before getting down, and entered the store. For a moment a vague notion came into her head of escaping through a rear door and hiding from him. But maturer thought soon convinced her that such a plan was impracticable. Gregory Khodkine was far too clever to permit himself to be eluded in such a way. He had made sure, too, that she had no money in her possession and without money her case was hopeless. The exciting events of the night and previous day had worn upon her and she now felt weak from lack of food. There was nothing for it but to obey Monsieur Khodkine's injunctions and so she made her purchase quickly, put on the hat, coat and gloves, and with the other articles in the suit-case, presented the bill to Khodkine, who gave her the money.

As he handed her into the machine he smiled at her gravely.

"I am sorry to have kept you up all night, but there is an inn near by and breakfast should be welcome."

Monsieur Khodkine was right. The coffee was poor, but it was real coffee, the eggs were freshly laid in a neighboring barn yard and the rations of war bread were nourishing. She found nothing to complain of in the demeanor of her companion and their breakfast finished they were again upon their way. Khodkine had now taken the suitcase into the front seat beside him and put Tanya into the tonneau, expressing a hope that she would find a chance to doze. It would

be impossible to stop to rest as many miles were to be covered by nightfall, and there was no time to spare. This rearrangement of their positions was agreeable to Tanya, for she had many things to think of. If she still had any thought of escaping, Gregory Khodkine quickly removed them, for the fuel of the machine having been replenished at Tuttlingen, she soon saw that he was bent on covering the miles to Munich at a speed as rapid as consistent with safety. His suggestion that she try to sleep in the tonneau was impracticable, for though the road was for the most part in good condition, the car swerved violently at the turns and it was difficult without holding by a hand grasp to keep an upright position. Indeed it seemed as though she never wished to sleep again. Her body was weary with sitting upright, but her eyes, wide open, stared along the gray road before her as she wondered at Gregory Khodkine's skill, persistence and tirelessness.

A German agent! Many things had happened that had made her suspect him of Teutonic leanings. But this! And Gregory Khodkine was but one of many. Poor Russia! She had indeed fallen into the hands of the Philistines.

Every mile they traveled carried the Princess Tatyana further into the enemy's country and nearer to those from whom this traitor drew his high authority. Already she had been given proofs of the character of his *laissez passer*. One glance by an officer of the guard seemed sufficient to send the machine flying upon its way. There was always too an air of quick deference and a military salute which accompanied it. What chance was there for her with the Central Committee at Munich to which they were bound, with the finger of the Wilhelmstrasse upon the latch of its door, with ears near by, strained for the first free murmur which passed the bounds proscribed? Members of this Committee had been to Nemi-Georg Senf--letters had passed between them. Madame Rochal even had come from Munich, properly accredited. Tanya felt very much alone, very much at a loss, helpless in the face of the innumerable forces opposed to her. But somewhere within her heart a hope still leaped that all might yet be well with Monsieur Rowland.

All night and morning the possibility of his death had weighed heavily upon her conscience, for she could not deny a personal responsibility in the series of events which had brought about the final disaster. Of course she could hardly have foretold the madness of Ivanitch, but the fact remained that she had cast her fortunes upon Monsieur Rowland's side, and by giving him the secret of the vault, had plunged him into the danger that had resulted in his undoing. There was a sweetness in the memory of their first encounter in the garden of Nemi. Here was a boy grown to manhood unspoiled by rough contacts. She knew nothing of his history, save by the vague phrases which confessed a roving habit and a knowledge of many sides of life. But the naturalness of their brief friendship, its ingenuousness and charm were singularly refreshing to one who from childhood

had been brought up in an atmosphere of intrigue and double meaning.

She could not believe that he would die. The vault was large. One, two, perhaps even three days might elapse before the air of the vault should be exhausted, and surely before that time a means would be found to enter it. Gregory Khodkine's revelation of Herr Liederman's plans had filled her with hope. Perhaps already Monsieur Rowland had been liberated and was devising means to offset the successes of her captor.

Would he follow her into Germany? And could he if he wished? If Picard had succeeded in crossing the frontier, her note to Shestov would have been delivered, for Picard, she knew, would go through fire for her. But what claim after all had she on this Philippe Rowland? A strange brief friendship, based upon the call of youth to youth, and an intimate community of interests born of her dependence and his mere love of adventure. (Poor boy! She had got him more than he had bargained for.) Or was his sudden allegiance born of something more than the interests she served? She tried to remember the things that he had said, the good-natured, disarming smile, the amused look in his dark eyes, that could be both deferent and bold.

And as she thought of this a slight frown gathered at her brows. His eyes could be bold and he was quite capable of suiting his actions to their meaning. Madame Rochal had lost no time in discovering Monsieur Rowland's knowledge of the complexities of her sex.

To a woman of the antecedents and training of Zoya Rochal the conquest of a person of Monsieur Rowland's frank disposition was a mere matter of opportunity and Madame Rochal had lost no time in creating that. But Tanya had been a little dismayed at finding how quickly the designing cosmopolitaine had accomplished her ends, more than a little dismayed, too, to find that Monsieur Rowland had so soon fallen to her wiles. And yet back of it all was the undeniable fact of Monsieur Rowland's cleverness, his genuine appeal to her own generosity and forgiveness which she had granted there at the door of the vault when he had seemed to have forgotten the numbers of the combination. His boyishness and humor had reassured her and something more than mere friendship she had seen in his eyes. The deference had been there, the boldness also, but there was another look which she had seen in other men's eyes, knew, and recognized. Philippe Rowland had given his allegiance to her cause, because it was in a measure his cause too, but he had also given Tanya Korasov his allegiance because of herself.

Unfortunately she realized that his promise to help her defeat an intrigue against the fortunes of the Society of Nemi was one thing; a chase across the enemy's country, from which, by great trial and good fortune he had just managed to escape, was another. She had given Shestov the slenderest of clues and Germany

was large. And if, not for her sake merely, but that of Nemi, of which he was the titular head, he decided to follow her fortunes into danger, where could she find the hope that he would succeed--without a passport, without influence and without means unless he borrowed them? Liederman--Zoya Rochal--Shestov--to the outwitted Councilors of Nemi, the loss of twenty-five millions of francs by the society would be a terrible catastrophe, as it was indeed to Tanya, for she had no hope that Gregory Khodkine intended to use this money in the purposes for which it had been contributed. If any part of it was to be used in Russia, its appropriation would be in the hands of Teuton agents who would dispense it at the dictation of Graf von Stromberg of the Secret Service to debauch the dreamers along the thin gray line which marked the only borderland between Prussianism and the free Russia she loved.

And yet, had not circumstance put Monsieur Rowland in a position of responsibility toward those who had contributed toward this vast sum of money for the propaganda of freedom and liberal government? He was the leader of Nemi, secretly elected in accordance with the strange rites which had come down from the forgotten ages. These hundreds of thousands did not know the names of the leaders of the order, but they did know that the Society of Nemi was great, and actuated by a high purpose and that its leader, whoever he was, was responsible to them for the use of the accumulated funds in its possession.

How much of this responsibility would weigh upon Monsieur Rowland? And if he felt it, what use would he make of the power that had come ready-made to his hands? Was he already upon his way to France to rejoin his regiment of the legion or would he...?

The Princess Tanya's pretty head dropped forward upon her breast and she awoke suddenly with a start. How long had she slept? The heat, the dust, the roar of the exhaust of the machine had worn upon her weariness, but she straightened guiltily as though she had been false to a trust. There was no answer to her problems but the implacable back of Gregory Khodkine's head, who drove onward skillfully without a word, the suit-case safe beneath his eyes and the source of his authority ever growing nearer.

At Ulm he bade her get down at the railroad station and deliver a message for the telegraph. Inside the door of the place, beyond the range of his vision, she scrutinized it eagerly--a mere jumble of words strung together, meaningless to her--in code. She sent it. What would have been the use of opposing him in this when he could confirm the message at the next town they came to? Indeed, during the afternoon messages were delivered to him as he arrived. And he read them with satisfaction.

Her case seemed hopeless and if indeed she had needed the proof, the venality of Gregory Khodkine was fully assured. But after awhile she became curious

as to how he would attempt to explain away these evidences of Prussianism.

"The miles increase your assurance," she said bitterly in Russian.

He found her gaze and then glanced away.

"It is well to take precautions. I am not in the habit of traveling with more money than enough for my immediate uses," he said with a lame attempt at humor.

"The responsibility weighs upon me."

"The responsibility to whom, Gregory Khodkine?" she asked.

"To those who have sent me," he replied uneasily.

"You grow bold with success."

"Who doesn't?" And then with a frown, "I warn you, Tatyana, of your promise."

Gone were the softer tones in which he had pitched his morning appeal. This was another Khodkine, the man who last night had asked her into his room at Nemi that he might try to frighten her into a confession of what she knew of the secret of the vault. She had evaded him then, had managed as she thought to throw him off the scent, but there seemed no chance of evading him now or indeed of finding any way into his confidences. She had missed her chance this morning. The sense of a possible power over him had flitted from her and with its loss came a sense of defeat and utter hopelessness.

If Monsieur Khodkine's sense of security had been increased he still drove rapidly and at turns in the road in the open country she saw him turn his chin over his shoulder and eagerly scrutinize the landscape behind them. But they had come far and it seemed hardly possible that pursuit could threaten now.

When Gregory Khodkine spoke it was to carry the war into her camp. He was quite civil and spoke in Russian in a low tone, but his question probed deep and took her off her guard.

"Princess Samarov, last night while you were outside the vault, your friend the American accused me of a connection with the Wilhelmstrasse, and obligingly gave me a *dossier*. Who told him that my name was Hochwald? Did you?"

Tanya was unprepared and involuntarily her hand clutched at her shirt waist where the papers were hidden in her breast. She recovered herself instantly and faced him quite calmly, her hand dropping into her lap.

"You are full of surprises, Gregory Khodkine. Hochwald! Is it true?"

His pale eyes were regarding her keenly.

"No. But who told him?"

"I can't imagine, unless Madame Rochal---"

"You are playing with fire, Princess. I must know the facts."

She shrugged lightly and smiled at him, though she was cold with fear.

"Then you must go to those who know them." Then, lying with the ingenuousness which only a woman can command, "Hochwald?" she said coolly. "I've

never heard the name before."

From the tail of her eye she saw his look flicker and leave her and she knew that she had baffled him, but the infamous records burned against her, smirched the clean skin against which they lay. It seemed that he must feel their existence as she did.

"You seem disturbed," she ventured carelessly. "It is the name perhaps you use in your dual role?"

"Yes," he replied shortly. "In Germany I have no other."

"Must I then use it here?"

"It would perhaps be better, when you speak in German," he muttered.

The incident passed and with it Gregory Khodkine's incertitude. Tanya who at the last stop for petrol had returned to the tonneau sat clinging to the supports of the top staring gloomily before her. Her new suit-case was in front of her. Beside it in a litter upon the floor, some spare tubes, a can of oil and other impedimenta. She examined them drowsily, wondering whose car this was and how it happened to be where they had found it. But she had asked no questions of Gregory Khodkine and now it didn't seem to matter, as long as the machinery held together until they reached their destination. But the new suit-case seemed to fascinate her. And then quite spontaneously an idea was born--a plan! It seemed utterly absurd--madness--and she dismissed it. It recurred again, was dismissed; then it came and remained in her thoughts, in all its precariousness, in all its beautiful simplicity. She looked again at her new suit-case and suddenly felt herself trembling with excitement. A wonderful plan to be sure, a brave plan, but unless fortune aided her, foredoomed to failure. But of the consequences she had no fear. After all, what could be worse than the uncertainty of this terrible, endless night and day. Gregory Hochwald might be an agent of the hated von Stromberg, but Gregory Khodkine would never dare to murder her, even if she succeeded in her venture.

All afternoon she waited for an opportunity, feigning slumber while she watched him through lowered eyelashes. But he drove on grimly, the millions of Nemi on the seat beside him, his gaze fastened upon the towers of Augsburg. But after dinner his mood was more cheerful and he invited her into the seat beside him again, and lighting a cigar drove off into the gathering darkness to the south. Khodkine no longer feared pursuit and success was to be the reward of his efforts, for they would reach Munich tonight. It was no wonder that he was happy. Tanya noticed a return of his solicitude for her comfort, and catered to his friendliness, assenting as though in sheer weariness to his plans.

"I hope that you may forgive me, Tatyana. It has pained me horribly to cause you so much suffering, but I am only doing what I believe to be my duty. When that is accomplished, you shall see how I will requite you for your generosity."

"You have left me no choice," she sighed wearily. "It does not matter. This is not work that women were made for. I am very tired."

"You poor child," he murmured. "It will not be long before you shall be quite comfortable and at home in the Bayrischer Hof. No one shall disturb you and you shall rest as long as you please."

"I shall be thankful for that," she said quietly.

"Our long acquaintance, Tatyana," he went on smoothly, "your knowledge of my character and the nature of my confession this morning must do more than any further words of mine to reassure you."

"Yes, yes," she sighed.

"Will you tell me at least that you are no longer angry with me?"

"No. I am not angry with you," she said promptly.

"And you will let me try by my kindness and consideration to correct the poor estimate you have made of me?"

"Perhaps--" And then wearily, "But do not urge me further now, Grisha Khodkine. My mind refuses to act. I am more than half asleep."

"Poor *dushka*. I shall trouble you no more. Sleep on."

And then, after a while, without warning came the watchful Tanya's chance. A tire blew out. Gregory Khodkine with a muttered imprecation stopped the car, got down and examined the wheel. They were in a deserted road with no lights of any kind in sight. Tanya stirred and questioned lazily. Khodkine had already thrown off his coat and was on his knees in the road. By the reflection of the lights upon the indicators, Tanya's eyes furtively examined the suit-case which contained the fortune of Nemi. The catch was closed, but the key was in the lock. All day Gregory Khodkine, keeping the suit-case under his eye, had not deemed the key important. And now----

Tanya, fingering the catch with one hand to be sure that it would open, leaned past the wheel and peered over the side of the car.

"Do you think you will be long delayed?" she inquired sleepily.

"A matter of twenty minutes, I should say," he grunted from behind the car, where he was tugging at the straps of the spare tire.

"Oh! Then do you mind if I creep into the tonneau and steal a wink of sleep?"

"Not at all. You'd better," he growled. "I may be an hour."

"Really? That's too blissful for words."

And crawling down slowly, lifting the suit-case containing the bank notes to the seat as she did so, she clambered down into the road beside him, making sympathetic inquiries as to the nature of the injury. He reassured her, but she saw how greatly he was absorbed and she wandered around upon the other side of the car. But her plan was already made. Ahead of the car along the side of the road she had seen some large loose rocks. There would be others here in the dark-

ness. Feeling with her feet, at last she found one, another, and stooping quickly picked the heaviest of them up, into her arms. Then she paused, feeling that her companion might have observed her, but after waiting a moment motionless she bent over and deposited them noiselessly upon the floor of the car.

"I think I will take my nap," she said sleepily. And as Khodkine assented she mounted into the tonneau. There was no moon and the clouds enshrouded the car in darkness, but for a moment Tanya lay upon the seat in the tonneau, watching furtively through the rear curtains. The car was already jacked from the ground and Khodkine was tinkering at the rim. Now was the time. She must act quickly. The bags were of nearly the same size. Silently, and taking care that no movement should shake the car, she hauled the suit-case which contained the banknotes over the back of the seat into the tonneau, then quickly removed the piles of notes, transferred them to her own bag, the contents of which she put upon the floor. Then she took up the heavy stones, wrapping them in the lap robe which she had used all day as a dust cover, and put them into the other suit-case, packing it tightly with the aid of the rubber tubes and other small articles until the stones were tightly wedged. Then she locked the suit-case, put the key in her pocket and with an effort restored it to its position beside the wheel in front. She then crept back noiselessly to the seat of the tonneau, where she lay breathless, her heart throbbing with excitement. It was done. She had done it. Gregory Khodkine was still hammering at the rebellious rim. She was a little frightened when she realized what hung upon the success or failure of her plan. The weights of the two suitcases it seemed to her were much the same. Gregory Khodkine could never know what she had done unless he examined the contents of the bag he had guarded so carefully all day. The key in her pocket would prevent that. But suppose that he became curious about the absent key. Suppose he found her new clothing upon the floor. The new suit-case was somewhat larger than the old one and she managed to get the linen and toilet articles into it. The other things she stuffed behind the cushions of the seat on which she sat. Suppose he chose to test the weight of *her* suit-case!

That at all hazards must be prevented. She moved it alongside of her just before Khodkine bobbed up out of the darkness and peered in, reporting that he would be ready to start in ten minutes. She snored gently, in reply, and presently heard him fussing at the wheel again.

Were the packages all inside the bag? Had she left any of the contents of her suit-case upon the floor of the tonneau? She could see nothing in the darkness, but her fingers eagerly searched the tonneau and finding nothing she breathed more easily. Fortune so far had favored her. What was to follow must be left to chance. Whatever happened she had much to gain and nothing to lose--unless, perhaps, the tender lapses from duty of Gregory Khodkine who was born Hochwald.

After a while he got into the driver's seat. She trembled as she saw him lift the suit-case containing the rocks and her newly bought finery to the seat beside him and for a terrible moment thought that he paused, examining the lock. Through her half closed eyes she saw him peer over his shoulder at her in a moment of hesitation and then heard the whirr of the engine as they started upon their way. Then one by one she took the articles that she had stuffed behind the curtains of the rear seat and choosing favorable opportunity dropped them onto the road or threw them into the hedge. When this was done she breathed more easily and straightened, yawned and sat up.

"I have slept," she said with a laugh. "How far have we gone?"

"Not two miles," grumbled Khodkine.

"Oh!" said Tanya in a tone of disappointment, "I thought we must be nearly there."

Now that she had started upon this venture she found a new interest in living. She was wide awake now, thinking quickly, for every vestige of her weariness seemed by some strange magic of her success to have vanished. Women have a natural talent for deception in minor matters, but it is under the spur of great necessity that they reach the perfection of dissimulation. Tanya weighed every chance of failure, and gained confidence in her ability to carry the thing through to its end. And so when they reached their journey's end and drew up at the doors of the Bayrischer Hof, she was standing upright in the tonneau, trying to carry lightly her heavy burden and had even stepped down upon the pavement before Gregory Khodkine had come beside her. If she could ever get the bag up to her room without letting it pass into alien hands!

Khodkine was for taking it from her at once, but she refused to relinquish it.

"You have quite enough to carry, Gregory Hochwald. If you will permit me--I am quite rested."

And with a glance at her face he smiled and led the way into the building. The hour was late and she was assigned to a room immediately, while Khodkine wearily bearing his suit-case which he like Tanya refused to relinquish, disappeared with the clerk.

Once within the sanctuary of her own room and the door closed and bolted behind her, Tanya sat upon the bed breathing hard, weak in the forces of reaction. But she realized that her difficulties had only begun. Her thoughts whirled tumultuously for a moment as she tried to picture Khodkine when he learned of the deception she had practiced upon him. There was no time to lose. She must do something with this money, something to put it forever out of Gregory Khod-

kine's way--but what?

CHAPTER XII

PURSUIT

Rowland's head ached, his muscles were stiff and the wounds in his cheek and shoulder needed first aid, but after they were given attention he lost no time, and breakfast eaten, Zoya Rochal's car was brought to the gate by Liederman and in less than an hour they were upon their way. Another suit of clothes and some linen from the posthumous wardrobe of Ivanitch, had restored the American to a semblance of presentability and he found his courage and optimism rising with every mile that they traveled. Barthou and Shestov remained with Signorina Colodna at Nemi to explain to the new arrivals the cause and extent of the disaster, and to keep in touch with the telegraph office in the village below, that they might be informed as to what happened in Germany.

Max Liederman drove and Rowland and Zoya Rochal sat in the tonneau.

On its face, this was a mad errand--to go flying into the heart of the enemy's country from which after weeks of trial Rowland had managed miraculously to escape. But a transformation had been worked in Rowland's point of view, as well as in his appearance. He seemed, in the few short hours he had spent at Nemi, to have achieved a mission and an object in life, something, he was forced to admit, that he had never possessed before. The mission,--a defeat of Prussian intrigue, the object,--Tanya Korasov. If the success of Monsieur Khodkine had for the moment balked him, he was aware now of a spirit of mild exaltation at the prospect of the dangers he must run in the hope of success. The sense of danger always made him cheerful and rather quiet. And so though the massive Liederman sat gloomily, driving with a heavy hand which at narrow places in the road seemed to threaten destruction, swearing volubly over his shoulder in the odd moments, and Zoya Rochal chattered excitedly in three languages, Rowland sat grinning hopefully into the long stretch of road which lay before them, thinking of Tanya Korasov and wishing that he had Monsieur Khodkine's throat in his fingers again. He would pinch harder next time.

Rowland had devised a plan which he hoped would enable him to pass the frontier in safety. And so, when a mile distant from the military posts that guarded the German line along the main highway, Rowland got down and after making a

rendezvous at a small town which Liederman suggested, three miles beyond the border, turned into the woods by the roadside and moved stealthily westward. This was a dangerous game, for in his escape from Germany a few days before, he had done most of his traveling by night, sleeping in the woods by day. But there was no time to be lost and nothing else to be done. Herr Liederman and Madame Rochal had their own passports of course and would go through without trouble, and once within the borders of Germany the inspection of the machine and its occupants would be less rigid than at the frontier gates.

The plight of Tanya Korasov and the responsibility which he now shared with her for the safety of the money had sharpened Rowland's wits amazingly. He reached the edge of the woods and crouched in the bushes on a slight elevation for a moment, studying the lay of the land to the northward. Then, discovering a slight depression upon his left down which a small stream trickled, he crouched, taking advantage of the cover which screened him from the view of some men working in a field and went northward rapidly for half a mile.

But he came at last to a spot where the stream debouched into a meadow, beside which was a farm-house and more men working. So he was forced to go back a few hundred yards and wriggle upon hands and knees in the shadow of a stone wall up a hill, at the crest of which he paused again for observation. Before him, again to his left beyond the farm houses, was a wood which spread northward and eastward. Once within its borders he felt sure that he could move forward in greater security. He clambered into some shrubbery, and upon the other side of the hill saw the road which approached the farm houses. Once across this the cover would be better. There was no one in sight. He crawled out of his place of concealment, braving detection for the few hundred yards of open country, dashed down the hill across the lane and in a moment was hidden in a thicket upon the further side. Here he waited again, watching in all directions, and then taking to the undergrowth went on more rapidly, at last reaching the protection of the thick woods, where he breathed a deep sigh of gratification. He had figured that the border line must cut somewhere near the center of this forest and could not be more than a kilometer away.

He was more at home here, for the starvation and misery of the past weeks had given him a skill in stealth and woodcraft which would have done credit to a North American Indian. The possibility of there being a wire fence along the border had not occurred to him, for if he had passed such a barrier a few nights ago, he had merely considered it the border of a sheep or cattle pasture, even believing at Nemi that he was still well within the German Empire. But suddenly as he moved forward a wire fence rose before him, a barrier of barbed steel, thickly woven between the stout posts that retained it. Rowland crawled into the center of a bush nearby and waited a moment, for along each side of the fence was a well-

beaten path which showed where the sentries passed. Rowland had resolved to burrow under the wire, since to climb such a fence, even if it were not electrified, would be difficult and damaging to his clothing, the presentability of which was essential to his safety. But he did not wish to attempt it until he was sure of the exact moment of the passage of the sentries. And so he waited calmly, aware of an intense desire to smoke which could not be gratified.

In a moment his patience and wisdom were rewarded, for, listening intently, he heard the thud of heavy boots and the sound of a fine masculine voice singing. The Swiss soldier approached, still singing and passed him. And not fifty yards beyond, the singing stopped and he, heard another voice in greeting.

"Ah, Kamerad--you sing well."

"One must do something to pass the time."

"Weary work--with nothing to show for it. You have seen nothing?"

"No."

"Nor I. It is the time for my relief. *Auf wiedersehen.*"

And the German soldier approached upon the opposite side of the fence and passed on.

Now was the time. Rowland waited a moment until both men were out of sight, and hearing, when he came out quickly, and approaching a slight depression in the soft loam below the wire, set to work burrowing furiously with his hands, in a few moments making a hole deep enough to wriggle through. Then covering the evidences of his work with leaves, crossed quickly into the woods beyond and disappeared.

It was a very weary and much bedraggled individual who emerged from some bushes near the highroad at the spot where the car was awaiting him. Liederman was fuming, Madame Rochal anxious. They had used two hours of time and it was now well past noon. But Rowland, though weary, was quite cheerful. He had already found a flaw in the perfection of the efficiency which had so astonished the world. There would be other flaws and careless, casual little New York would find them.

The passports of Zoya Rochal and Herr Liederman and the credentials which the latter carried, showing him to be a member of the Reichstag, would probably be sufficient to pass the party along the road. But to insure less chance of detention an alias was provided for Rowland in case of surprise. He had become Herr Professor Leo Knaus, Curator of the Schwanthaler Museum, returning to Munich after a brief holiday in search of lost health in the Bavarian Highlands, where through an unfortunate accident, his knapsack containing all his personal papers had been lost from a cliff into a deep torrent whence their recovery had been impossible.

By making detours, avoiding the larger towns, however, they managed to

travel fifty or sixty kilometers without even so much as seeing a soldier, and Liederman figured that once well within Bavaria away from the Swiss border, the scrutiny of their papers would be less exacting.

And whether by good luck or good management they reached Ulm without mishap, where Herr Liederman had friends and influence. And then a passport for the unfortunate Herr Professor from Ulm to Munich was procured which made the remainder of their journey less hazardous.

Rowland would have felt more comfortable if he had had a little money of his own, for though Madame Rochal and Max Liederman seemed well supplied with funds, he would find himself in a pretty pickle if he were suddenly left upon his own resources. He ran his fingers hopefully through the pockets of Kirylo Ivanitch and found nothing--oh, yes, the coin of the Priest of Nemi with which Khodkine last night had presented him. He had shifted it to the new clothing with the matches and cigarettes. He fingered it carelessly, then brought it forth and examined it--a clever bit of low-relief, done by an artist, probably Italian.

Madame Rochal who had been vociferously exchanging opinions with Herr Liederman found curiosity more essential to her happiness than argument and bending suddenly forward, examined the coin.

"Who gave you this, Monsieur?" she asked excitedly.

"Monsieur Khodkine--last night. It was to be the symbol of our eternal friendship. The Gods will otherwise."

"It is the Talisman," she cried. "Do you know what its possession means?"

"Ah, yes," he said, shrugging lightly, "that I'm the King-pin in your twenty-thirty." And as she looked puzzled he laughed. "That I'm the Head of the Society of Nemi. But how the devil that's going to help me here, I can't quite see."

"Monsieur Rowland," she broke in, "this is most important. In Munich you will need no better credentials than this."

"But I'm an enemy of Germany--an American."

"Of Autocracy--of the Army--yes. But Internationalism knows no enemies."

"You mean----?"

"That the Democrats of Germany, whether Socialist or Revolutionary, will receive you as a friend. Names--nationalities mean nothing to them now. All that they need is a leader who has no fear of the Army--and a spark to cause the conflagration."

"And you believe that I----?"

"Precisely," she said with a flash of her dark eyes, "if I have not misjudged you. *You, Monsieur!*"

She showed the coin to Liederman who fully confirmed her opinion. The Talisman passed with the office, and it was very lucky that Rowland had found it, for there was no other like it in the world. Rowland looked at the coin with

interest, and then flipped it carelessly.

"Heads I win, tails Khodkine loses," he laughed. "You see, Madame. Anyway you look at it Nemi triumphs."

Zoya Rochal examined Rowland's profile through her half-closed eyes and when she spoke she used English, a language which fell from her lips quite as readily as French or Russian.

"Monsieur Rowland," she smiled, "you are quite the most cheerful person I have ever known in my life. You always smile more when things go wrong. I don't understand. Do you never get angry?"

"Well, rather! Once when a piece of Boche shrapnel smashed my jimmy-pipe, right out of my teeth. It was the best pipe I ever had," he finished thoughtfully.

She laughed. "I've never met one like you before. Most men are so desperate in great affairs."

"H--m. I've been desperate a lot of times but didn't find it helped me much. I tried that in the vault last night and only barked my shins. So I went to sleep and dreamed I was married to a princess--until Herr Liederman blew me up."

"A princess!" she smiled archly. "Monsieur Rowland, you still have the heart of a child." Her voice sank a note as she glanced at the back of Herr Liederman's head. "It is that which has attracted me to you. The world has grown so old in wisdom and in sin," she sighed.

He laughed. "It's a good old world but it needs a vacuum cleaner. We've got to 'get' Khodkine, Madame Rochal. He's a breeder of germs."

"And is bred of Germans----" she whispered.

"Same thing--disease in the *Welt Politik*--always excepting our good chauffeur----," indicating Liederman's broad back, "who is your friend and mine and therefore quite all right." Rowland was silent a moment and then turned and laid his hand over Zoya Rochal's. She turned her palm upward and their fingers clasped.

"You and I, Madame----"

"Zoya----," she corrected.

He smiled and touched her fingers lightly to his lips.

"Zoya----," he repeated. "Pretty name, that. Zoya! You and I must swear an allegiance."

"I have already sworn it in my heart," she said softly.

"And I can count upon you--whatever happens."

"Yes--for Russia."

"There are many Russias----"

"The Russia of the Constituent Assembly--the Russia of sanity--of reconstruction----"

"Good. We understand each other. A beautiful woman is a power, but a clever, beautiful woman----" he smiled at her gaily, "the world lies at her feet."

Her fingers closed upon his own and she looked past him down into the valley of a little river which flowed past them while her voice seemed to trail away into the beautiful distance.

"If you would only lay it there,--Philippe!"

His eyes boldly sought for flaws in her perfect face, and found none. And yet its very perfection was in itself a flaw, for he knew something of her history. Passion had made no mark upon her, or the suffering she must have caused in others. Whatever the world had done to her soul, it had passed her beauty by as though that in itself were a matter of no importance.

But Rowland did not kiss her, though he had a notion that this was what was required to seal their compact. He only laughed a little.

"You shall have it, Zoya Rochal. I give you my word on it, if you will help me to catch Gregory Khodkine." And then as he released her hand, "Tell me something of this Central Committee of Bavaria."

She watched him as he lighted his cigarette and marveled a little at the coolness of his renunciation of an opportunity.

"Perhaps you didn't know that it is from the Central Committee of Munich that I come to Nemi. Perhaps also you may think it strange that I, a loyal Russian, should stand high in such councils. But politics make strange affiliations. I have served the cause in many countries and in Germany I have secretly stood with advanced Socialism. As you have seen, I possess papers which permit me to come and go as I please and I am not without influence even in Berlin."

"Ah, that is strange. A secret agent----?"

"What you choose. In the past I've done Prussia some service in Constantinople, Buda-Pesth and Vienna. But since the war began---" she shrugged. "Can you not imagine? After all, I am a Russian."

"I see. And this Central Committee at Munich,--who is its leader?"

"George Senf, a giant among pigmies. You shall see----"

"A member of the Society of Nemi?"

"Yes, and more than once a Councilor. But he serves our cause better in Germany where his name is a byword for fearlessness and wisdom."

"And Liederman?"

"Herr Liederman represents Georg Senf and his followers on the floor of the Reichstag. They are both loyal men but Senf is the master."

"Thanks. This is what I wanted to know." And then, after a pause, "But why should Monsieur Khodkine choose Munich as the place to which to take this money?"

"That has puzzled me, but I think I am beginning to understand. The first

stronghold of the Order of Nemi is in the Munich Committee and those others which it influences. Monsieur Khodkine plans first to take the money to a place of safety; then to throw the whole power of the Government into the Committee to thwart its leaders, who are the friends of Nemi and to divert this money to the corruption of Russian leaders, in the Prussian cause."

"You are positive as to this----?"

"This or something worse," she said.

"What could be worse?"

"Its theft by Khodkine himself or its appropriation--by the State."

"Can this be possible?"

"Anything is possible in Germany."

Rowland pursed his lips in a tenuous whistle.

"I can well believe that. You have heard that Khodkine is a Prussian agent?"

"I know nothing of Khodkine. Our paths have not crossed except at Nemi. But I am ready to suspect him of anything. There is much energy conserved in twenty-five millions of francs," she finished cynically.

"Well, rather," he laughed. "Twenty-five millions--five million dollars! Phew, but that's a lot of money! Think of the eats and shows and things----"

"You'd get a lot of jimmy-pipes with that, *mon vieux*," she laughed and then lowered her tone suddenly. "Where are you going to put this money if you recover it?" she questioned.

Rowland puffed his cigarette quite calmly but hid his thoughts under the cloak of his perpetual smile.

"Would you like a new hat?" he asked.

"There are many things I would like, *mon Philippe*," she said coolly. "A villa at Monte Carlo, an hotel in Paris, a very tiny one, but--" she halted suddenly and shrugged, "but I'm not apt to get those things with the money of Nemi." And then with a dramatic gesture, "Is it not pledged to the Cause?"

He did not look at her for fear that he would betray the confirmation of his suspicion. But the impulse stirred in him to follow this line of subjective inquiry still further.

"And yet I cannot forget that it was you, Zoya, who at a doubtful moment swung the Council of Nemi in my favor."

"I have not regretted it--nor shall I."

"I owe you much. I am about to place myself in a position where I shall owe you more. With your help in Munich I am doubly armed. Something tells me that we shall win. But I must pay----"

"You shall pay me with your friendship, Philippe," she murmured. "That is all I ask. You will give it me, will you not?"

She was clever. He drew closer and looked into her eyes which had in them

something of the appealing quality of a child's. It was difficult for him to believe that her expressions were not genuine, but he could not forget the warnings of Tanya Korasov and smiled into her eyes with a boyish frankness.

"Have I not already given it to you, Zoya? Last night--you didn't mind? Your lips were very close.... They are very close now----"

Max Liederman narrowly missed a tree at the side of the road. Then he swore that terrible German oath which translated means "thunder weather," slowed his pace, stopped the car, then turned around in his seat.

"What do you talk about in English, you two?" he roared, his face as black as the weather he apostrophized. "Is it not enough to try and drive rapidly without these distractions behind me? You will come to the front seat, Zoya," he growled, "or I shall drive no further."

"By all means," said Rowland cheerfully, getting up and opening the door. "If Madame will descend."

Zoya obeyed, but the pressure of her fingers and the look she gave him advised him of her preferences.

"You act like a spoiled child, my great bear," she said to the German, with a laugh. "I was merely telling Philippe of Georg Senf and the Committee."

"Philippe!" he growled. "Already----"

She said something to him and as Rowland got in behind them he drove off again. But it was easy to see how the wind sat in that quarter.

Rowland was obliged to admit that the woman distilled a kind of subtle poison. There was a time.... But by the bloody beard of von Tirpitz--not now! Her beauty passed him by. It was not for him, for he was now measuring loveliness by other standards. He would play the game, must play it, wherever it led, even with Zoya, but he found himself hoping that it would not lead too far. He had reason to doubt her sincerity and had guessed the inspiration for this sudden affection upon the part of Madame Rochal. She had long lived upon admiration and received it of Rowland as a right, but more than this, she loved power, and more even than power, the money that brought it. Max Liederman was a horrible example of the effectiveness of her art, for it was plainly to be seen that he was infatuated and was now even jealous of Rowland. It wouldn't do to stir up Liederman, or to blow cold with Zoya, for he needed them both and meant to use them to the best of his bent, for after all was not his captive Princess awaiting him yonder, somewhere in the blue haze beyond the plain, and how could he hope to succeed in finding her without the help of Liederman?

They had made good time and by early afternoon had passed Ulm on the way to Augsburg. After dinner Liederman's spirits rose and lighting a big black cigar, he invited Rowland into the seat beside him, while Zoya Rochal leaned over their shoulders and joined in the conversation.

"Herr Rowland, you have not yet explained entirely to my satisfaction how you happened to be inside the vault. Khodkine surprised you there with Fräulein Korasov, *nicht wahr?*"

Rowland told him the truth.

"I understand," said Liederman when he had finished. "And what were you going to do with the money?"

"I don't know. Fräulein Korasov had planned for that."

"Ah--and you trusted Fräulein Korasov?"

"Implicitly."

Liederman laughed and tapped Rowland playfully upon the knee.

"Ach--a little tenderness in that quarter, *nicht wahr?*"

This was for Zoya's benefit, but the heaviness of his humor made his intention rather pathetic.

"Fräulein Korasov was kind to me. She fed me when I was starved. I could hardly show anything but gratitude," said Rowland quietly.

"What assurance can you give me that her intentions were honest?" asked Liederman.

The man was so dull. But Rowland kept his patience admirably.

"Merely this--that Fräulein Korasov sought to prevent the very thing that has happened. She distrusted Monsieur Khodkine."

"Ach, so. That is the one bond we all have in common. But Herr Khodkine is clever. If he has high authority for this game he is playing, we will be at our wits' end to circumvent him."

Rowland thought a moment.

"You may be sure he will have that authority," he said at last.

"You know----?"

Rowland paused again. Where did the German in Liederman end, where the Socialist begin? Rowland took the chance.

"He is an agent of the German Government," he said shortly.

He was soon to find out where Herr Liederman stood. The machine swerved violently as the German's heavy hands suddenly grasped the wheel.

"A secret agent!" he muttered. "Who told you?"

"Fräulein Korasov."

"And how did she learn this?"

"From Kirylo Ivanitch."

"The devil! How did he find out?"

"I don't know. But he knew."

A stream of smoke and sparks flew backwards from Herr Liederman's cigar as he puffed violently. He was much disturbed.

"The Wilhelmstrasse! It is worse than I supposed."

"It is well to know the worst," Zoya Rochal's clear voice cut in coolly, "for then we can plan for it. Georg Senf must know at once."

"It will be a battle for our existence," said Liederman grimly. "They dare not interfere with our meetings," he roared. "They dare not!"

"You feel very sure of yourself," put in Rowland. "I wish I were as confident."

Max Liederman clenched his great fist, held it for a moment suspended in the air and then let it fall quietly upon the wheel. To Rowland, who had felt the might of German autocracy, the action seemed typical--the clenched fist of an aroused people which did not dare to strike, a fist restrained in awe of a habit of thought! But Liederman's words were brave enough.

"The German Socialists will permit themselves to be intimidated just so far," he muttered between set teeth. "And then they will show their might. It may be that this is the straw that will break the camel's back. We shall see. They will not find us unprepared."

"Who is Graf von Stromberg?" asked Rowland, suddenly recalling the name in Khodkine's *dossier*.

A stifled murmur came from Zoya Rochal.

"Br--! You do not know? The most terrible man in the world. He knows everything about everybody. A thinking machine which nothing escapes, which sees into every cranny of Europe, with power no less than that of the Emperor himself. That man!"

Madame Rochal paused in the spell of some unpleasant reminiscence.

"Why do you ask, Herr Rowland?" questioned Liederman quickly.

"Because I have reason to believe that for some years Khodkine has taken his orders from him."

"Do you think that he was acting under orders from General von Stromberg when he took the treasure of Nemi?"

Rowland shrugged. "How should I know? It is possible."

"You have learned a great deal in a very short time," growled the Socialist. "I owe you an apology. I thought you were a fool, I'm glad to admit I was mistaken."

"I'm stupid enough at any rate to admit that I won't know where to find Fräulein Korasov when we reach Munich. Without her we shall move in the dark. Her testimony before the Committee----"

"That is true. We must find her. But you must leave that to me. You shall see. Ten thousand men if we need them will search for her. By tomorrow night at the latest----"

Zoya Rochal behind them was laughing softly. "It is not at all improbable that you will find them in the Imperial suite at the Bayrischer Hof."

Rowland felt the blood rising to the tips of his ears but he kept his composure.

"Them, Madame Rochal?" he questioned soberly.

"Why not, *mon Philippe*?" she laughed. "One can live quite decently even in Munich with twenty-five millions of francs."

But he played the game and laughed the remark aside.

"There is nothing in the animal world so unkind as one beautiful woman to another."

Zoya Rochal shrugged, Liederman scowled, but Rowland smoked quietly, his gaze on the distance.

Inquiries along the road, which was well traveled, revealed no knowledge of Monsieur Khodkine or of his stolen Mercedes--which Max Liederman had paid for--but they drove steadily on, passing Augsburg and reaching their destination late at night, where Herr Liederman drove directly to the house of Georg Senf, which stood in a region of small houses thickly settled.

An enormous bearded head stuck out of a window, heard Liederman's earnest plea, and in a moment they were admitted to the house, where the whole tale of their adventure was told, when Zoya Rochal, protesting that not for twenty-five hundred millions would she lose another hour of sleep, was driven to the Russischer Hof where Rowland and Max Liederman promised to meet her upon the following day.

CHAPTER XIII

A SCENT

George Senf was leonine. Aroused suddenly from his bed, the disorder of his long white hair and beard gave him a singularly wild and ferocious aspect. But he got out a long-stemmed pipe and after lighting it, settled down with a steady eye to listen to the story that Liederman and Rowland told him. He heard them through to the end, putting in keen questions or incisive remarks here and there which did much to reassure Rowland that their case was in capable hands. This was a leader of men, a thinker and a man of action, and his comprehension of all aspects of the situation and the definite manner of his decisions, left no room to doubt that he believed a crisis to be impending between the forces he represented and the powers of the government which stood behind Khodkine. When Liederman and Rowland had finished he sat for a long while on his bed smoking, his brows frowning, staring at the opposite wall. At last he waved them away.

"Go," he said shortly. "You will need your sleep. My work begins now—at once. Tomorrow we will have a report from Fraulein Korasov. We need her. The meeting of the Committee is tomorrow night. Come here when you have slept and we will plan further. Good night."

And so the two men returned to the Russischer Hof and found the sleep of which they were both much in need. But it was with some mental reservations that Rowland went to bed, for he had vowed that until Tanya was found he would never rest in peace. He had seen something of the double nature of this Gregory Hochwald, and the possible dangers to which she might be subjected filled him constantly with vague alarms. But he realized that he must rest to be effective upon the morrow. If his conscience troubled him, he had no chance to be aware of it, for he was sound asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

Liederman was hammering upon the door of the adjoining room which he occupied before Rowland awoke and sat up in his bed, blinking at the light of broad day, and after a hurried bath and breakfast they called upon Zoya Rochal and hastened to the house of Georg Senf.

They found the Socialist leader in his bedroom, which was blue with the tobacco smoke of a secret conference of several men, three of them leaders, as Rowland afterward discovered, in labor organizations allied to the Socialist-Democratic and Socialist-Revolutionary parties. As the new comers entered there was a silence except for the words of greeting of Georg Senf and they all rose and made place. One of them wore a workman's blouse, and the others were shabbily dressed but in all three Rowland noted the same characteristics--the broad brows of intelligence, the firm lips of resolution, the clear penetrating gaze of men accustomed to think for themselves.

"This is Herr Rowland," said Georg Senf briefly, "the new President of the Order of Nemi, who has come from Switzerland on this sudden mission."

The men bowed and shook the hand of the American gravely.

"You will not find Munich lacking in ardor, Herr Rowland. Our followers are many and we are strong," said one, named Conrad Weiss, who was chief telegrapher of the Munich Post Office.

"You will need to be strong," said Rowland, "for there is every sign that a test of your power is coming soon."

"We are ready for it, Herr Rowland," rumbled the deep bass of Herr Hoffner, who wore the blouse, "and the people of Bavaria are behind us. They are sick--war weary. And the time has come."

"Have you arms--ammunition?" asked Rowland pointedly.

The question seemed to have probed deep below the surface, for no one replied at once. And then spoke Herr Yaeger, a smallish man with long hair and the dark eyes of a dreamer.

"Arms--ammunition. Yes, perhaps--here and there. But arms are *verboden*. It is necessary that we move with caution. Nor do we wish to win with arms or ammunition, Herr Rowland. Stronger weapons,--poverty, hunger, the rights of one man as against another. They will triumph in the end."

Rowland assumed an air of dignity he was far from feeling, for deep in his heart he realized as these men did not that strong as their organization was, or firm its affiliations, the time would be long in coming for any nation which so feared the *verboden* sign. He was sorry for them, but he dared not tell them so. He had that maddening inclination to laugh which came to him sometimes upon the most sober occasions, but he bowed his head deeply, saying nothing, which as every one knows--is the part of wisdom.

In this he added to the respect with which they held his office and when Georg Senf drew the meeting to a close, offered him all the help that was in their power to find the money that had been taken.

"That is well," finished Senf, "you will carry out your instructions. You, Herr Weiss, to the telegraph office and summon all leaders for tonight by the harmless code of initials. The meeting is at ten. So lose no time. You, Herr Yaeger, to your factory. You, Herr Hoffner, will keep in readiness for a further call. Herr Berghof will please remain."

Now for the first time Rowland noted a figure in the corner of the room, who rose as the others went out and came forward at a sign from Herr Senf and was presented to the new arrivals.

Georg Senf, relighting his long-stemmed pipe, paced the floor before the fire place.

"I have been busy, my friends, while you have slept," he said. "This matter of the money brooks no delay. In ten minutes after you left this house last night I had made my plans. Our comrades live all about me here and by daylight our different leaders had been notified. By breakfast time thousands of members of our organizations were combing the city in all directions. Every hotel, every pension--An hour ago we met with some success----"

"You've found her----?" broke in Rowland eagerly.

"Only to lose her again." As Rowland sprang up Senf raised his hand. "One moment. It was through no fault of our own--or of Herr Berghof's here, who could not of course have known that Fräulein Korasov's interests and mine were identical."

Herr Berghof, a thin, ferret-like person, smiled and squinted as Rowland glared at him.

"You saw her, Herr Berghof----?"

But Georg Senf broke in again with maddening, methodical Teuton insistence.

"All things in order, Herr Rowland," he said calmly. "A little patience and you shall know all. Herr Berghof is a Social Democrat, but not a member of the Order of Nemi. He has been brought here by Herr Weiss a while ago, somewhat against his will, but he has replied to our questions, upon the condition that the matter is kept secret! Will you relate what happened last night, Herr Berghof?"

The little man cleared his throat, squinted and nodded politely.

"I am a stranger in Munich, a Swiss, from Basle, but I have much interest in the Socialist cause. Democracy is very near my heart and if I can help----"

He glanced at Rowland, who had risen, his patience nearly exhausted.

"You will please proceed directly to the matter in hand," said Senf placidly. "Fräulein Korasov came to the Bayrischer Hof last night----?"

Zoya Rochal shot a triumphant glance at Rowland but his gaze was fixed on Berghof.

"Yes, Herr Senf," the man replied, "I am connected with the management of the hotel. At about eleven, with a gentleman who called himself Herr Hochwald----"

"Hochwald!" muttered Rowland in surprise.

"That was the name--the name also given by the gentleman awaiting him in the south drawing room--who said he was expecting his arrival."

"Ah, I see."

"Fräulein Korasov was taken at once to a room, number two hundred and twenty-one, upon the second floor. She carried a large suit-case. I myself conducted Herr Hochwald to the south drawing room where a visitor was awaiting him. They sat conversing at once in a low tone of voice. As I was not wanted I gave Herr Hochwald the key to his room which was upon the third floor of the hotel, at some distance from that occupied by Fräulein Korasov."

"I see. And then?"

"And then? Nothing. I went to sleep. I was very tired. You must understand, Herr Senf, we are very lacking in service at the hotel and upon the day before I had been on duty----"

"Proceed, Herr Berghof," growled Liederman. "At what time did you see Herr Hochwald again?"

"Oh, yes. It must, have been at least an hour or more later. Herr Hochwald, accompanied by Herr Förster, the man who had met him in the south drawing room, came running down the stairs and awoke me, swearing in a manner such as I have thought was only practiced by officers in the army, and demanding to be let at once into room number two hundred and twenty-one. The proceeding was most unusual, especially as Herr Hochwald had been so particular in ordering that Fräulein Korasov was not to be disturbed by anyone. They had knocked upon her door, they said, but had not been able to get a reply and feared that something

had happened to the lady. So I procured my ring of pass keys, and followed them up the stairs. The matter was delicate and one which might have involved me in much difficulty with the proprietor of the hotel, but when I hesitated Herr Hochwald raved and swore again, knocking so that others nearby might easily have been awakened, and then, thinking that perhaps something might really have happened to the Fräulein, I found the proper key and opened the door."

The clerk paused to get his breath and Liederman swore softly.

"The Fräulein was sitting upon the edge of the bed, fully dressed," he went on, "as though aroused from a sleep of utter exhaustion. But she gained her dignity and self-possession almost at once and quite naturally, demanded the meaning of the intrusion."

"The suit-case,' cried Herr Hochwald. 'You have the suit-case here?'"

"Fräulein Korasov looked a little bewildered. 'The suitcase? Yes, I have my suit-case here. But what----?'"

"At that moment Herr Förster espied the bag of Fraulein Korasov upon a table and running across the room fell upon it eagerly, and opened it. There was nothing in it but a few pieces of linen. And Hochwald let forth another of his mad cries."

"The money,' he said. 'What have you done with the money?'"

"The Fräulein had now risen and stood, very pale and angry."

"I don't understand you,' she said quietly. 'The money? What should I know about the money?'"

"Herr Hochwald stood a moment, his face working, trying to compose himself. And then turning to the officer who stood uncertainly, 'Search the room,' he ordered, 'everywhere. It must be here.'"

"Fräulein Korasov stood immovable. 'It is a pity, Herr Hochwald,' she said coolly, 'that you have neither honor nor decency.'"

"What have you done with it?' he went on, trying to keep his composure, 'tell me now, and all may yet be well.'"

"I know nothing,' she replied."

"Herr Hochwald stared at her a moment and then, as though to himself. 'This is a grave matter. We shall take further steps.' And seeing me standing beside the door, he seemed suddenly to realize that I had seen and heard all that had happened, for he frowned and ordered me from the room."

"Go,' he muttered, 'and order a cab--at once. Fräulein Korasov, you will descend with me. Herr Förster, you will stay, continue the search and question the servants. You have full authority. It is understood?'"

"At your orders, Herr Hochwald,' said the other."

"That was all I heard, for I went below and ordered the cab, into which Herr Hochwald and the Fräulein entered and were driven away."

The man paused and there was a moment of silence, when a storm of questions assailed him.

"The directions to the driver," cried Liederman.

"Herr Förster found nothing?" asked Zoya Rochal.

"The servants were questioned?" demanded Senf.

"I did not hear the directions to the driver," said Berghof, with a shifting glance at Rowland. "The man who conducted the Fräulein to her room could shed no light upon the matter."

"But you. Did Herr Förster not question you?" asked Rowland keenly.

"Yes. He questioned this morning, and I answered him. It is not healthy not to answer the questions of one in such authority."

There was another silence, baffled it seemed on the part of the questioners. Herr Berghof took up his hat and rose. Rowland no longer smiled. Liederman rocked to and fro from one foot to the other by the mantel-shelf. Zoya Rochal nervously lighted a cigarette.

"One moment, Herr Berghof," said Rowland, whose mind had been tracing the interstices of the puzzle in his own American way. "You say that this Herr Förster has questioned the servants of the hotel?"

Herr Berghof hesitated a moment.

"One or two only. What was the use? The Fräulein had been there but an hour or more."

"But you seem to forget that in that hour much happened," said Rowland. "If that money was taken from the valise of Herr Hochwald, it was taken before he reached the hotel, not afterward. If Fräulein Korasov took it--ah----" He paused a moment, then went on quickly, "She had a valise, you say. Empty?"

Herr Berghof hesitated again and shot a quick glance over his shoulder toward the closed door behind him. But Rowland had risen and now stood beside it.

"You say the suit-case was empty?" repeated Rowland sternly.

Berghof swallowed uneasily.

"Except for one or two articles of apparel--yes."

"Then where did the other bag come from?" asked Rowland suddenly.

Berghof's little eyes squinted rapidly and he moistened his lips nervously.

"The other one?"

"The one in which the money was removed?"

"I--I don't understand."

"Follow me closely, Herr Berghof. You have said that Fräulein Korasov carried her suit-case to her room. Were there servants to perform that service?"

"Yes."

"Fräulein Korasov had the money in that suit-case. Herr Hochwald knew

that she had taken it, or he would not have gone to her room at night with you and forced the door. She did take it. But who helped her?"

"I'm sure I----"

"Are there bells in the bed-rooms?"

"Yes, but----"

"Where do they ring?"

"Er--in the office. It is an English system----"

"Were there any calls between eleven and half-past twelve?"

Rowland was shooting his questions at the bewildered clerk like thunderbolts, and the man seemed to have grown more and more anxious.

"Calls? I dropped into a doze in my chair, as I have said. I cannot----"

"Think----!"

"Yes, a call or two--but I was half asleep----"

"A call--who answered it?"

Berghof rubbed his head with unsteady fingers but replied with reluctance.

"Yes. There was a call."

"Did you answer it?"

"No. It is the duty of the valet or night porter."

"Did the night porter go?"

"I--I presume so."

"The night porter! What is his name?"

Herr Berghof now seemed truly alarmed and for a moment refused to reply.

"What is his name?" thundered Rowland.

"Drelich!" said Berghof sullenly.

"Is he on duty now?"

"No."

"Can you find him?"

"No."

"You shall try. I will go with you. He is the man who has taken the money."

Liederman and Senf who had followed the rapid deductions of the American with astonishment, rose eagerly and Zoya Rochal laughed her admiration.

"You are right," said Senf.

"It is worth trying," muttered Liederman.

"There is no time to be lost," said Rowland quickly. And then to Senf, "Have your men been sent to trace the cab?"

"No, Herr Rowland--since the money was the most important----"

Rowland reached down into his pocket, pulled forth the talisman of Nemi and crashed it down upon the table.

"If there's any virtue in this--if Nemi is anything but an empty word--if its leader is your master as well as your slave, then do as I command," he said sternly.

Herr Senf gazed at the coin and then looked up at the dominating figure before him.

"What more can I do----"

"Find me the man who drove that cab," said Rowland. "And you, Herr Liederman--give me money. I need it."

Max Liederman glanced at Zoya Rochal, then at Rowland, and without a word obeyed.

"I will go with you, Herr Rowland," said Zoya Rochal decisively.

But Rowland was already out of the door, his hand on Herr Berghof's arm.

Georg Senf ran his fingers through his long hair and looked at Liederman as Rowland went out.

"If we have longed for a leader, Herr Liederman, the God of Democracy has sent us one. Some of his fire has got into my ancient bones. I will follow and obey."

Liederman grunted and glanced at the door through which Zoya Rochal had departed.

"He is keen," he muttered grudgingly.

"Moreover, his judgment is excellent. Our case falls without Fräulein Korasov. We must find her. I myself will go to the cab stand in the Maximilian Strasse. Call Herr Hoffner if you please and I will give him instructions."

In the meanwhile Rowland and Zoya Rochal with Herr Berghof found a cab. The Swiss, at first sullen and inclined to balk Rowland's plans, was speedily brought into submission by the American's determined attitude and the exhibition of an automatic, the mere sight of which made him become more obliging and cheerful. And they found the lodgings of the porter Drelich at last, and Drelich himself quite drunk upon his bed in his room. But he became more sober and quite alarmed when the purpose of the visit was disclosed to him. He was a man of sixty, servile of manner but at first furtive and obstinate, giving evasive replies. But Zoya Rochal, who was resourceful, informed him that she was an agent of the Government and the man collapsed.

"Against my better judgment, I did it, Fräulein," he stammered. "Money is not made so easily nowadays."

"Fräulein Korasov gave you money?" asked Rowland eagerly.

"Five hundred marks. I give it to you. Here it is," and with trembling hands he brought it forth from a greasy note book in his pocket.

"Tell us what you did and you may keep this money," said Rowland quickly.

Drelich straightened hopefully and looked from one to the other.

"I did this thing in ignorance. How could I know that the Fräulein was working against the interests of the Fatherland?"

"Speak--what happened?" ordered Rowland.

"I was called to the office by Herr Berghof to reply to a call upon the indicator. He will tell you that. I noted the number and went to room Number two twenty-one. The Fräulein within looked out at me and I could see that she was very much disturbed. Then she called me within the room and shut the door behind me. As the lock caught I too was startled for I could not know what was to happen. She produced from the pocket of her coat this note which she held up that I might look. 'I want a suit-case or a bag of the size of this one,' said she. 'Bring it here at once and obey my further instructions and I will give you the money.' I remembered that there were some old suit-cases in the porter's room--long unclaimed and it did not take me more than a few minutes to unlock one of them with my keys, to empty it and return to room Number two twenty-one. I am sure that I have done nothing which could put me under suspicion of having done other than a service to a guest of the hotel."

"Go on," urged Zoya, as the man paused.

"The Fräulein took the suit-case into the bath room and in a moment brought it forth and handed it to me. It was very heavy but that was none of my business."

"What did you do with it?"

"My instructions were to take it to the Haupt Bahnhof and leave it in the check-room, returning with the check which I was to give to her, provided I had an opportunity to hand it to her unobserved. So I told Herr Berghof that I was taking a bag to the station and carried it there."

"Ah! You told Herr Berghof that and when you returned you gave her the ticket?" asked Rowland excitedly.

"There was no chance. When I returned to the Hotel and went up the servants' stairs to the second floor I heard a loud commotion in the corridor and peering out saw Herr Berghof and another gentleman standing before the door of the Fräulein, knocking and shouting. Then I knew that it was best for me to remain silent. So I went to Herr Berghof reporting that I was sick and went out of the hotel and--then I think that I drank more than was good for me--for I have slept until just now when you awakened me."

"Did anyone come to your room while you slept?"

"How should I know? No one comes here."

"No one could have taken the ticket for the bag?"

The man looked bewildered.

"I don't know----"

"The ticket--the check for the bag," shouted Zoya, mad with excitement.

"It is here----" he said. And fingering stupidly in his waistcoat pocket Drelich produced an oblong slip of card board.

"The Haupt Bahnhof," cried Rowland. "Come----"

And dragging the unfortunate Drelich by the arm before he had a chance

even to take up his cap, Rowland turned toward where Herr Berghof had stood beside the door.

The man had disappeared.

A blank look came into Rowland's face, followed by a sudden frown, as he cursed himself for his stupidity in not keeping better watch. But there was no time to spare and pushing Drelich before him into the waiting cab in a moment he and Zoya Rochal were driving post haste to the Railway station.

"Was the bag locked?" asked Zoya eagerly.

"I don't know."

"We shall find it," muttered Rowland between set teeth.

"Monsieur Rowland!" said Zoya, smiling at him joyously, "you are quite the most wonderful man in all the world. Accept my congratulations."

"Wait----" said Rowland shortly.

As they drove up to the station Rowland leaped out and still holding Drelich by the arm hurried toward the parcel room, Zoya Rochal breathlessly following.

At the window, his heart leaping with suspense, Rowland presented the ticket to the baggage agent, who with maddening deliberation moved slowly along an aisle, whistling and peering to right and left. Zoya, her hand trembling on Rowland's arm, watched the leisurely movements of the official, like Rowland a prey to maddening incertitude. They saw the man go down the aisle looking at bag after bag, finally picking out a bright yellow suit case, bringing it forth and laying it upon the counter.

Rowland glanced at Drelich who was staring at the new bag stupidly. But compelled by Rowland's gaze he frowned and whispered,

"It is not the bag----"

"It's not the bag!" repeated Rowland. "There's some mistake here."

The official scratched his head and frowned.

"That is strange. It is impossible that our checking system should err."

"But it *has* erred," roared Rowland. "It was this man himself who brought the bag here--this office which gave him the ticket. Is it not so?" to Drelich.

"That is true. A black bag, old, plastered with labels----"

"We never make mistakes," broke in the official with rising anger. "Our records show that this is your bag. You must take it."

Rowland could have laughed in the man's face, but instead he raised his voice again, while the fingers of Zoya Rochal closed upon his arm and he realized that a crowd was gathering.

"Will you not let this man look and see if he can discover my property?" he asked more quietly.

"*Verboten*," said the official shortly, and turning on his heel, walked back to the records of the system which could not err.

There seemed to be nothing to do but take the yellow suit-case to the cab and depart. Somewhat bewildered by this ill turn of fortune, which could not be explained Rowland took up the bag dejectedly and was about to lead the way to the door when he felt Zoya Rochal's fingers fiercely clutch his elbow. She stopped, her face blanching, her eyes staring wildly at a tall figure in a military uniform who stood before her.

The man was very erect and quite old, his face graven with innumerable fine wrinkles which just now had broken into a cynical smile.

"My compliments, Madame," said a thin crisp voice. "It is a great pleasure to meet you here, so unexpectedly."

Zoya Rochal had recovered herself instantly and forced a laugh.

"You--Herr General! It is--a great pleasure----"

"You grow more beautiful, Madame--with every year. A little pale--perhaps--but it becomes you, like the blossoms upon a meadow in June. You are quite well?"

"Ah, quite, Herr General----"

"It seemed to me that perhaps you were a little nervous."

"It is so long since I have seen you. I thought perhaps that you might be angry at my failure last year----"

"Angry? I? One cannot expect to succeed always." And then, with a malicious grin, "You are not engaged in any propaganda dangerous to the Fatherland?"

"Ah. You--you are unkind. Have I not----?"

"Women are the only uncertain quantity in the world equation," he said slowly, his eyes peering down at her. Then turning to Rowland, he asked quickly, "Your companion is harmless?"

Rowland, who had stood uneasily, bag in hand, now found refuge in a smile.

"Harmless--yes," stammered Zoya. "Herr Leo Knaus--Herr General Graf---"

."

"No names, Madame," broke in the tall officer with a smile. "Good-bye--and remember that Argus had a hundred eyes----"

And with one keen look which seemed to sweep them both comprehendingly, from top to toe, the Herr General clicked his heels and departed. Zoya Rochal remained as though frozen to the floor, looking after him. Rowland caught her by the arm and moved slowly toward the door.

"Sardonic old pelican!" he said with a grin. "Would you mind telling me who in the devil----?"

"The devil himself," she broke in, with a stifled voice. "Graf von Stromberg!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE CLUE

The shock of Madame Rochal's announcement took Rowland's breath away. If they had needed any explanation of the disappearance of the black bag, here surely was one which would have satisfied the most exacting. Von Stromberg--head of the Prussian secret service--the most hated, the most feared man in all Europe!

The jig was up. Rowland shrugged, making up his mind to bluff it out to the end, and so with his hand on Zoya's nerveless arm, walked with an appearance of great carelessness toward the door of the station, beyond which their cab was awaiting them. An official stood near the door and a soldier nearby but when Rowland reached the man, he merely preened at his mustache and smiled at Zoya. They reached the door. Still no arrest. The thing was interesting. What was the game? In the doorway Rowland stopped, put down the bag and in spite of the whispers of Zoya Rochal deliberately faced the door while he lighted a cigarette. The official had turned his back. The soldier had walked away.

He was frankly puzzled. It hadn't needed a great deal of imagination on Rowland's part to convince him that if Herr General von Stromberg had been instrumental in the theft of the bag, there was very little time left to Rowland in which to say his prayers. By all the rules of the game, he should already have been arrested, inside of twenty minutes he should be in a prison and tomorrow morning he should be shot. But here he was free, carrying the odious yellow suit-case and getting into a cab, under the very eyes of the very person who had most to lose by his liberty. Had Efficiency slipped a cog? Or was there a motive behind this astonishing leniency? Or--still more surprising--was von Stromberg as innocent as he and Zoya as to the whereabouts of the bag of the Bayrischer Hof? Indeed he was almost ready to believe so.

He turned again at the door of the cab and slowly gave directions to drive to the house of Georg Senf and then, while the pallid Zoya beseeched him frantically to hurry, he got into the cab and sank beside her.

If von Stromberg was the man who had found the money why, with all the authority he possessed, had he not arrested Drelich, Berghof, Liederman, Zoya

Rochal and Rowland, put them in prison and discussed the matter afterwards? What was the meaning of this extraordinary consideration? Was it due to the nature of the business in hand,--a desire to keep secret the dark business of the theft of the funds of Nemi which would antagonize the small army of Socialists in Munich who were growing in power in the message they were sending across the breadth of the nation? Or was von Stromberg waiting until all the cards should be in his own hand, when he would play them to win?

Indeed, if the millions of bank-notes were already in his possession, it seemed that von Stromberg had already won and could afford to laugh at Herr Senf and all his followers. And yet if this man of mystery and power already knew so much why had not Rowland already been imprisoned as an alien enemy and a spy?

To this mental question there were two answers--the first the obvious one that Gregory Hochwald had not believed that Rowland, the escaped prisoner from a German camp, would dare to risk his life again following the fortunes of Nemi into the heart of the enemy's country, and that von Stromberg had accepted this opinion; the second, that General von Stromberg had just descended from his train from Berlin and knew nothing about him. The first answer was plausible but it didn't satisfy. The second satisfied but it wasn't plausible. For the old demon had surely acted the omniscient with his keen eyes and sardonic smile, frightening poor Zoya half to death. And yet it was just possible--. D---- the fellow! He couldn't know everything. Rowland was plucking up his spirits admirably. At least he hadn't been arrested yet.

Poor Zoya seemed for the moment bereft of all spirit and initiative and leaned back in the cab, frowning out of the window, her arms folded, a very thunder-cloud of vexation.

"We have lost," she said at last, in despair.

"It seems so," said Rowland with a smile, lighting another cigarette. "And yet there remain several matters which I do not understand."

"That man! There will be much more that you do not understand if you have to deal with him. He is uncanny--in league with the devil himself."

"Perhaps. I can well believe it."

As the thought came to him, Rowland glanced suddenly over his shoulder out of the rear window.

"Ah, I thought so. It's not von Stromberg, Zoya. It's Hochwald! We are being followed. Two men on bicycles."

She was too well trained to look around but seemed no happier because of the discovery.

"There's no use losing one's nerve," said Rowland cheerfully. "In fact, I'm growing happier every minute."

Madame Rochal's amazement was painted in her face.

He shrugged. "Because if General von Stromberg had succeeded in getting the money, he would have arrested us both in the Haupt Bahnhof."

"You mean that----"

"That someone else has taken it. Precisely."

"Hochwald?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. But, as we say in my country, 'I'm from Missouri, you've got to show me.' And if Herr Senf is the man I think he is, I'm going to proceed on that theory."

The workings of Philip Rowland's brain, it seemed, had been a mystery to her from the first, when she had thought him such easy fish for her net and she looked at him now with a new interest as though some more brilliant facet of his personality had suddenly been revealed to her. She threw her hands impulsively over his own and drew closer to him.

"You, at least, *mon brave*--are a man!" she said.

"Listen, Zoya," he put in quickly. "This is no time for fooling. It's going to be a squad and a stone wall for me, if things don't break right. You've got to do what I tell you. I've got a lot to do between now and night and I can work better alone. I'm going to give those blighters back there the slip. You're to go on to the Russischer Hof, take the yellow bag, and wait. Understand?"

She nodded, pressed his hand, sighed and sank back in her seat.

He leaned forward, gave some orders to the driver and then as they turned a corner where the traffic was thick, he opened the door quickly, jumped out and lost himself in the throng upon the sidewalk. As the cab went up the street he had the satisfaction of seeing the men upon bicycles pass him by in their vain quest and with a smile turned the nearby corner and hurried in the direction of the house of Georg Senf, which was upon the other side of the river.

"D--- the woman!" Rowland was muttering. "I've got other business."

What mattered the millions of Nemi if he couldn't find Tanya? He shut his lips and increased his stride, tortured by the maddening uncertainty as to her whereabouts. A serious matter, Hochwald had called it. It would prove a serious matter for him, if they ever met on anything like equal terms. And yet if it was von Stromberg who was opposed to him, what was the chance of his finding Tanya in this city of more than half a million people? But if Nemi meant anything, there was a power here that might be more than a match for this subtle Prussian General. What was he here for unless to seize the millions of Nemi? But he hadn't seized them yet. Rowland's immunity from arrest was the pledge of it. Then who had them--who had taken the black bag? Was Hochwald playing some deep game of his own in defiance of the dangerous Prussian? And if he had taken the black bag why had he ordered these men to follow his cab in-

stead of arresting him at once? Rowland had now reached the point of believing that Hochwald didn't know where the black bag was. This new hope was based on other premises than his inherent optimism. There were several missing links in the stories of Drelich and Herr Berghof. Each by itself was clear, but taken together, there was food for thought. He hadn't liked Herr Berghof. The fellow had a shifting eye. He had come to testify because not to do so would have made him an object of suspicion. Rowland had watched him closely and had noted the growing hesitancy in his manner as the American had probed deeper into the problem. Why had he suddenly fled? Did he know that there would be no money in the bag to be redeemed at the Haupt Bahnhof? In this case he was an agent of Gregory Hochwald or Baron von Stromberg. Or had he fled because he thought that there would be no bag to redeem? And why, if an agent of Hochwald, should he show such inquietude? And why, on the other hand, disappear suddenly on the eve of a recovery which would redound much to his credit with a probability of substantial reward? Berghof hadn't rung true somehow.

As he strode rapidly over the bridge, dismissing the elusive bag and thinking of Tanya, he made a resolve to put the authority of Nemi to the test. He had taken this greatness because it had been thrust upon him, in a spirit half of amusement, half of adventure, because Tanya had demanded it of him. But the joke seemed to be on him now. These Bavarians were serious, sober and deeply in earnest and if the *verboten* signs didn't frighten them before they started something, there was a promise of big doings in Munich before many hours passed. He was It, the grand mogul, and great things were expected of him. He would try not to disappoint them. If he didn't find Tanya and the money it wouldn't be long before the prettiest little revolution this prince-ridden country had ever seen would be brewing right here, where brewing was the leading industry. He would brew them one and if it ever got properly started, it would reach to Potsdam.

At the house of the Socialist leader, Rowland gained a new sense of his power. For during his absence the heads of many of the different labor organizations of Munich had called to offer him their fealty and encouragement. And to focus his attention quite definitely upon the meeting tonight, Senf showed him a message that had been received from Herr Hochwald a moment before his arrival, announcing that gentleman's intention to be present with the Central Committee at which he expected to bring up matters of grave importance.

"They're going to test our strength," said Senf quite calmly, "and we're going to let them. It will be a fight for our existence."

"If they'll only forget the *verboten* signs," said Rowland absently--for he was thinking of Tanya.

"I beg pardon," asked Senf politely.

"I was thinking of another matter. How shall you succeed against Hochwald

while he holds your most important witness? They will believe that Fräulein Korasov has taken this money unless she is there to accuse her jailer. I must find her, Herr Senf. And you must help me--before tonight."

"Ah," said Senf with a sudden access of interest, and told Rowland of a report that had come to him a short while before. The cabman who had driven the Fräulein and Herr Hochwald away from the Bayrischer Hof had with some difficulty been found. He had driven them to the garage of the Bureau of State Railroads and the pair had departed in an automobile. The official at the garage, evidently acting under instructions, refused to talk, but Senf's agent had been lucky, for a mechanic in the garage was a political follower of Max Liederman's and a member of the Order of Nemi, and had heard quite accidentally that the automobile had gone to a villa upon the banks of the Lake of Starnberg.

Rowland's eyes kindled. It was high time that fortune aided him. Starnberg he found was less than twenty miles away and could be reached by railroad in three-quarters of an hour. He sent for and questioned the man who had brought the information, but could elicit nothing more, for the mechanic had told all that he knew and there was no way of finding the precise location of the villa without arousing the suspicion of the official and this might be fatal to any plans to effect a search.

When the man had gone, Rowland looked at the clock on the mantel. It was four o'clock.

"Herr Senf," he said with a smile, "you have done wonders. I could not have asked more of you. I must move now in search of the Fräulein and move quickly. I'm going to Starnberg at once."

"You! But, Herr Rowland--the committee! We meet tonight. I had counted upon you to speak to them----"

"I shall try to come back in time--I shall try," he muttered, with a wave of his hand. "But you see how it is--without her----"

"We must do what we can."

"Are there members of the Order of Nemi at Starnberg?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, a few. Herr Benz----"

"You must send a wire to him at once to expect me. I leave on the first train."

"Three-quarters of an hour. I will do as you say. But you will return?"

"Yes----"

Senf wrote a message and gave it to a man who was waiting outside the door.

"To Herr Weiss--in the code. A handkerchief--a red handkerchief in his left hand--you understand?"

The matter of a disguise was imperative and in a few moments in the blouse and cap of a workman Rowland stood in the door shaking the old man by the

hand.

"One thing more, Herr Senf. Herr Berghof must be found at once, and hidden until my return."

"Herr Berghof! He should come willingly enough."

Rowland smiled.

"I'm afraid not. He has taken fright."

"But why?"

"I don't know. If he is honest you should find him at the Bayrischer Hof. If he is merely frightened the matter may be more difficult. But if he knows more than he has told us he is already on his way to the Swiss border----"

"You suspect him----"

"I suspect everyone. He says that he was asleep. But Drelich avers that he told Berghof he had carried a suit-case to the Haupt Bahnhof. Berghof knew that and he knew also what the suit-case contained--money--much money."

"True," cried Senf excitedly. "But how could he have redeemed the bag without the ticket in Drelich's pocket?"

"He couldn't. But he could have gone to the lodgings of Drelich and taken it. The porter was drunk."

"And the ticket Drelich gave you?"

Rowland grinned. "Would there not be other baggage checks in the office of the Bayrischer Hof? The owner of the bag may be hunting it now. Find the owner of that bag, Herr Senf, and we will know who made the substitution."

"Donnerwetter!" cried Senf. "It is quite possible. But if we have learned this much what is to have prevented Herr Hochwald from learning it also?"

"Nothing, unless----"

"Unless what, Herr Rowland?"

"Unless Herr Berghof has managed to elude him."

Senf scowled at the opposite wall. "We shall see about this. Go, Herr Rowland, you may leave this matter quite safely in my hands. I will bring Herr Berghof here and crush the truth from him with my bare hands."

Rowland laughed at the old man's enthusiasm. "Yes. But if you don't find him in Munich a wire to Shestov or Barthou might not be inadvisable."

"You think----?"

"I think nothing," said Rowland. "I'm tired of thinking. But I'm the best little guesser in Munich. And now I must be off."

Sending Liederman to Zoya Rochal and the Russischer Hof to search the yellow bag and if possible find its owner, Rowland went at once to the Haupt Bahnhof and took a train for Starnberg. He had no definite plan. But what he had already seen of George Senf's influence and following gave him new courage. If Tanya were still at the villa to which she had been taken, he would find some way

to reach her.

In the train many plans came into his mind. He now knew that the man he was to meet here and if necessary others who did his bidding would be absolutely at his orders, and the sense of the power that he possessed made him bold. It might be difficult to find the villa to which Tanya had been taken, for Starnberg was a town of several thousand inhabitants. But the villas, he had been told, were strung along the wooded slopes of the lake, each in its spacious grounds, and Gustav Benz would know the names and occupants of all the regular summer residents. It would perhaps not be difficult, once he found where Tanya was, to approach the place with five or six men and accomplish by force what might be difficult alone. But there was a strong argument against a fight, which might bring in the police and end in publicity if not disaster. The subtler plan appealed to him more. Hochwald could hardly suspect the good fortune that had enabled Rowland to discover the whereabouts of the prisoner, and if not aroused before Rowland's plans matured, would probably permit some carelessness of Tanya's jailers which would open the door to her escape. Rowland meant to move slowly until he was sure of his opportunity, then acting quickly with such means as presented.

It was half-past five o'clock when he descended from the train, with an old bag of Senf's in his right hand, in the guise of a Munich workman off for a few days' holiday. In his left hand he carried a cheap red handkerchief, with which as he reached the platform he wiped his brow. He waited in a moment of apparent indecision when a man at the door of the station stepped forward. He had a handkerchief in his left hand. Rowland stopped before him and the man extended his hand.

"You come from Herr Senf?" he asked.

"From Senf, yes. You are Herr Benz?"

"Yes," replied the other. "Come."

CHAPTER XV

THE TURKISH CIGARETTE

He was a prosperous looking man, a small house-owner, perhaps, or tradesman, but he had a broad brow and a look of alertness which were an earnest of his intelligence. Rowland walked by his side conversing easily of casual things until they reached a street upon the edge of the town, built up with rows of smaller

houses, all much alike, each in its well kept yard. Into one of these houses Benz led the way and in a moment they were safe from curious eyes. Rowland was quite certain that he had not been observed either upon the train or in the town and it was therefore with a feeling of confidence as to his own present security that he informed Herr Benz of the nature of his errand and the necessity for immediate aid from those friends who had the interests of the Order of Nemi at heart. Herr Benz made no pretense of concealing his antipathy for the Prussian government, and proclaimed his full allegiance to the Socialist cause. The deference which he paid Rowland and exacted of his son, a boy of sixteen, the supper served by the neat Frau, and the willingness Herr Benz expressed to aid in any possible way, showed Rowland how deep and strong was the undercurrent of antagonism and unrest in the hearts of the placid easy going Bavarians.

Benz knew Starnberg, he said, as he knew the palm of his hand. He had been born and bred here and for twenty years had conducted the small bakery which was now his own. He knew every villa as far as Possenhofen where Elizabeth, Empress of Austria, as Herr Rowland must be aware, the daughter of Duke Max, was born. Every villa.... He must think. All these people were good customers of his, and had been for years. His son every morning early delivered the bread, a distance of two miles or more to the furthest house. Did Herr Rowland believe the villa he sought could be as far away as that? Rowland shrugged helplessly.

"I know nothing more than I have told you," he said. "A villa upon Starnberg See--near Starnberg--that is all I know."

Benz nodded, but his brow was puzzled.

"Near? How near? A mile? Fortunately, all the villas that need be considered are on the east bank of the lake. That reduces our labors. I will try to remember them one by one."

That task seemed to be hopeless, even with the aid of the boy, who was called in to testify. The day was now fading and so Rowland suggested that they go out and walk the length of the road and attempt by a process of elimination to isolate those houses which might for any cause be classed as possibly open to suspicion. The suggestion was acceptable to Herr Benz. And so he left word with his son that if any message came from Herr Senf over the telegraph, arrangements for which had already been made, Benz the younger was to bring the message along the road on his bicycle, and keep passing to and fro until he found them. They then set forth, smoking their cigars, very vile ones, which Herr Benz had provided, and presently were walking down the well ordered driveway along the shimmering lake. One by one Herr Benz named the owners of the cottages, puzzling here and there over a doubtful case, Rowland with an appearance of great unconcern, eagerly searching the grounds with his glance, the lighted windows for a glimpse of a feminine figure which might be Tanya's.

The night was warm and upon the terraces overlooking the water many of the occupants of the houses were sitting enjoying the night air. He heard the low murmur of their voices, a light laugh here and there, the sound of a piano and young people singing, but nothing that could give any immediate clue as to the location of the villa he sought. And yet Tanya Korasov was here somewhere near him waiting for the aid that had not come.

At the end of the driveway which now became a mere country road Herr Benz paused, for the distance between the houses had grown greater and except for a few small cottages in the dusk beyond, the region of larger places had come to an end. The total results of Herr Benz's process of elimination to this point were five houses as follows:--

Two small villas, the names of whose occupants were unknown; a large unoccupied house belonging to an Italian, Count Montefiori, who because of the war had been absent for three years; the magnificent place of Baron von Speck, occupied only by the servants, its owner being on the staff of Prince Leopold in France; the château of Frau Baltazzi, an aged Grecian woman of wealth who lived alone with a female companion.

It was with some difficulty that the impatient Rowland constrained himself to sit with Herr Benz upon a rock overlooking the placid lake and calmly discuss the matter.

"You are sure," he asked, "that you are quite familiar with the antecedents of the occupants of all the other houses?"

"Quite, Herr Rowland. In the case of additional persons coming into these houses, the orders for bread would undoubtedly be increased. My son is a clever boy. He would hear of any new comers through the kitchen doors. With these larger houses the case is different, Frau Baltazzi is a woman of mystery. She has no friends in Starnberg. But she is very old and an invalid. It is possible that Herr Hochwald may have the authority to compel her--but I doubt it, Herr Rowland."

Indeed, after a process of question and reply which seemed to be sufficiently conclusive, only the residences of Count Montefiori and Baron von Speck remained as probabilities. Having reached this conclusion, it was decided for the present to concentrate all attention upon these two places. And so, turning north, they walked slowly back toward the town, while Benz told what he further knew of the two residences under suspicion. The place of Baron von Speck was just before them on their right, a pretentious stone mansion, in the midst of a grove of trees, beyond a spacious lawn, at some distance from the road.

Rowland, who felt sure, because of the Baron's rank and affiliations that the use of this house by a representative of the Prussian secret service would be justified, was for entering the grounds at once and making a thorough investigation of the premises. Time was precious and it was worth taking a chance. But Herr

Benz hesitated. Here again Rowland discovered that awe of the military authority which he had noticed in Max Liederman, a habit of thought bred in the bone since childhood, which for a moment of inaction seemed to have created a sudden atrophy in this man's interest and enthusiasm. But the moment passed for Herr Benz did not lack courage.

"Wait here," he said at last. "I will go and inquire."

So Rowland concealed himself in a clump of shrubbery within the grounds while he watched the figure of Benz go around the turn in the road toward the house until he was lost in the shadows. He had promised not to move, but every impulse urged him to follow and pursue the investigation in his own way, for he felt sure that the end of the chase was near. But he realized that Herr Benz had reasons for his method of approach and decided at least for the present to await in patience the result of his investigation. After awhile he heard the footsteps of the man crunching the gravel of the driveway and in a moment had joined him.

Benz was shaking his head.

"I went to the kitchen and saw the housekeeper, telling her of the new order as to the slight increase this summer of the ration of war bread. She had not known of it and was thankful for the information, but informed me that her own orders from the Baron were strict and that her household had been reduced to three persons, so that what she was allowed would be sufficient. Further conversation followed and she took me to see the view of the lake from the terrace. There is no one there, Herr Rowland, but the three servants. I would take my oath to it."

Rowland's hopes fell. And yet he realized that after all the decision of Herr Benz had been a wise one.

"Did you make any inquiries in regard to the villa of Count Montefiori?" he asked.

"Yes, and they know nothing."

And so the two men went northward again more rapidly.

The Montefiori villa, like that of Baron von Speck, lay within spacious grounds well wooded, the house itself, built of stone and stucco, like many of those famous residences on the lakes of Italy, just upon the edge of the lake, the waters of which lapped the base of the stone wall which protected its terrace and garden. As Benz had said, it had long been unoccupied except for two servants and if the Prussian government had seen fit to use it, for purposes of its own, the fact could, he thought, be quite easily discovered. But the method of approach which had been so successful in the case of the house of Baron von Speck might be hazardous here, since Herr Benz was not upon terms with the caretaker, Taglitz, a north German, an old man of a violent temper who suffered much from asthma. Last year Benz had quarreled with him about the payment of a bill. And so it was decided that he and Rowland should separate before they reached the place,

moving with caution under the protection of whatever cover availed, in a quiet investigation of the lighted windows and garden. Rowland chose the side toward the lake and leaving the road where the shadows of the trees afforded protection, moved down through the underbrush cautiously, peering forward, waiting and listening and then making a long detour to avoid a stretch of lawn until he reached a small ravine, down which a stream trickled to the lake below. Progress was slow because of the necessity for caution, but at last he emerged near the edge of the lake and hidden behind a huge rock gazed upward toward the windows of the house, less than two hundred feet away.

He saw that a wall of stone separated the terrace from the lawns. There was a gate in the wall probably locked so that it seemed as though the best mode of approach would be from the lake itself to the stairs which led up to the terrace.

There was a light in one window of the house, upon the second floor under the tiled roof, another, a dim one, in the room which let out upon the terrace, and he thought that he could distinguish the low murmur of voices above the lapping of the waters of the lake beside him. But he was not sure. There was no way of getting nearer the house from this side without a danger of being observed, for the moon had risen and there was no cover on the lawn before him. And so he lay quiet for a while, keeping watch on the windows. While he looked he fancied he heard voices again from the window upstairs and then shortly afterward a new light appeared in the wing of the house, a candle or lamp which threw a large shadow upon the wall. For twenty minutes he watched it and then he heard the sound of a door closing and at the same moment the light went out. Whoever had gone to that room had left it, taking the light with him.

He fancied now that he heard the sound of a masculine voice and then a figure appeared upon the terrace, threw a cigarette over the wall into the lake and then went indoors, but a cloud had come over the face of the moon and it was not possible to distinguish the identity or appearance of the smoker. But presently upon the light breeze was wafted the odor of a Turkish cigarette. After a while the light on the lower floor went out and so Rowland slowly retraced his steps up the ravine to the road, determined to choose another point of observation. He lighted his pipe and passing the gates to the park went on to the farthest boundary, the appointed spot at which he and Herr Benz had decided to meet and compare notes.

Herr Benz had heard nothing, seen nothing suspicious; but when Rowland informed him as to the man with the Turkish cigarette Benz listened attentively.

"You are quite sure that it was a Turkish cigarette?" he asked.

"Quite positive."

"That is curious."

"Why?"

"Because in Munich one smokes a pipe or a cigar. The cigarettes one may buy are too expensive for such a man as Taglitz, this caretaker, to smoke."

This seemed a slender straw to clutch at but as Rowland thought of it the smell of the Turkish cigarette seemed to grow in significance. Taglitz, an old man who suffered from asthma, would hardly choose a Turkish cigarette, even if he dared smoke at all. And the only other occupant of the house was his daughter, who cooked his meals and looked after him. Either Fräulein Taglitz had formed a very bad habit or Herr Taglitz had visitors. And so they walked a short way down the road toward the town while they planned. Herr Benz wanted to go to town and bring two of his followers, one of whom could watch the driveway, the other to hide near the house while Rowland found a means of entrance, by the terrace, from a boat on the lake. To this Rowland agreed, insisting however that he should remain watching the house in the meanwhile. They had just bidden each other farewell and Rowland had turned back toward the suspected villa when he heard the sound of voices behind him and stopped to listen, returning quickly to the group.

Herr Benz introduced him quickly to a man young Benz had brought with him.

"This is the Government telegraph officer at Starnberg station--but a friend, Herr Rowland. He brings you a message from Georg Senf."

"A message----!"

"I know nothing of this matter," said the man in uniform. "The message was in cipher. It is this: 'Herr Berghof was murdered this afternoon. No clues. No trace of bag.'"

Berghof murdered! Rowland questioned the man eagerly.

"At what time did this message arrive?"

"Less than half an hour ago."

"It came by private code?"

"Yes, from Herr Weiss."

"I see. I owe you many thanks."

"I would do more if I could. But I must return at once."

"Go then. You will be on duty later?"

"Until morning, Herr Rowland."

"Good. I may have a message to send."

The man bowed and departed with the younger Benz, while Rowland watched them in silence until their figures were merged into the night.

Berghof murdered! By whom? And why? The answers to these questions were obvious if he chose to follow the train of thought that was uppermost in his mind. Had Hochwald killed him? Or Förster? or another agent of von Stromberg? The motive one of two things, to secure the black bag filled with the bank notes

which Berghof had taken, or to silence a tongue which had already spoken too much. Or perhaps both. Whatever the facts, the death of the man with the squint was eloquent of the fact that Rowland had not been far wrong in his deductions. Herr Berghof had paid the penalty--either of cupidity or disloyalty to those who employed him. In any event it was clear that if the black bag had ever been in his possession it had now passed to a confederate--or to Gregory Hochwald! And therefore if---

A warning sound from Herr Benz brought his speculations to a close for from within the grounds they had just left came the sound of an approaching motor car.

"It must have been hidden in the porte-cochère," Benz was muttering. "I did not see it."

As the machine approached, they walked toward it and it passed them at a rapid rate going in the direction of the village. Just one glimpse they had of the occupants, a chauffeur and a man wearing a cap, sitting in the shadow of the curtains in the tonneau and smoking a cigarette. Who was he? It was impossible to tell. But to Rowland's keen eyes the figure seemed strangely like that of Herr Hochwald.

Imagination? Perhaps. Rowland's interest in the villa Montefiori was now such that he was ready to think anything that would confirm his growing belief that here was the prison of Tanya Korasov. Herr Benz too shared his excitement. Herr Hochwald hurrying to the Committee meeting he had called! The thing hung together. There were few enough motor cars in the Empire, and all those not in use by officials of Munich had been put into requisition for military purposes. There was but one machine in Starnberg, an ancient affair which could only be hired at a price beyond the means of any but the most wealthy of the town. He had seen a machine this afternoon rapidly passing his bakery which was on the highway to Munich--was it this very machine? It had a top like this, a chauffeur and one man sat within. He had commented upon its passage to his boy. The young fellow, who shared the mystery of their search, now voluntarily cleared their minds of doubt, for with that omniscience in all things which pertain to makes of cars, he ventured in a guarded tone--

"It is the very machine which came from Munich this afternoon."

"How do you know?" asked Rowland, eagerly.

"It's a Mercedes, sir," he said. "I know it by the shape of the hood."

If a machine went back and forth between the Villa Montefiori and the city of Munich it was doubtless because of urgent affairs in which some official empowered to use automobiles was involved. Who but Hochwald? And what affairs, unless those of Tanya and the black bag of the Bayrischer Hof? Rowland had reached the point where he felt that he must leap at a conclusion of some sort. At

any rate there were two men the less at the Villa Montefiori and it was time to risk everything in an effort to bring this adventure to a conclusion whether in failure or success.

Rowland planned rapidly. A short distance below them there was a cross road which led down to the lake, at the foot of which in the dusk of the evening he had noticed a small pier or jetty near which a number of canoes, sailboats and row-boats were moored. He proposed to take one of these boats and under cover of the darkness, row down in the shadow of the bank to the stone steps of the villa which led from the terrace wall to the water. As the sky had now become cloudy and the night quite dark it would thus be possible to come unnoticed much nearer to the house than if he attempted to enter by the road or to cross the lawns where the stone wall must be climbed. Herr Benz would wait in the Pavilion which seemed to be deserted. If Rowland did not return before ten o'clock he was to take another row-boat with the other two men whom young Benz had gone to fetch from Starnberg and follow.

Benz demurred at first, professing a desire to share his dangers, but at last consented to the arrangement, and Rowland embarked and set off upon his solitary venture. As it was still early there were many young people out on the lake in canoes and sailboats returning to shore and the sounds of their voices came softly across the water.

Their presence in the neighborhood was reassuring and likely to distract the attention of any visitors at the Villa Montefiori. Rowland slipped slowly down under the very shadow of the terrace wall where his boat drifted in close to the steps where Rowland listened for a long moment, and then fastened the painter to a ring in the wall and disembarked.

He had determined to enter this house and search it from top to bottom, regardless of consequences. A fool's errand? Perhaps; for he had little evidence to confirm his theory which after all had been born more of hope and desperation than any proof. And yet the chance was worth taking for at the best it meant merely a discussion with an irascible and asthmatic watchman; at the worst perhaps an encounter with a government official who had a private commission, with which he could have no concern, and this meant a rapid retreat and the saving of his skin. But the death of Berghof and the passage of the mysterious automobile from what was reported to be an untenanted house, had seemed to point him a way which he couldn't ignore. If Tanya were here the element of surprise would be in his favor, and as his head reached the level of the top of the steps, where he paused for a long moment of inspection of the house, he saw no indication of watchfulness on the part of those within. There were a rustic table and a number of benches and chairs upon the terrace, and crawling up on his hands and knees he hid himself behind a bench where he could examine the lower floor of the house

at closer quarters.

There was a loggia enclosed in glass just before him. Within, in the main body of the house, a light was burning. At some risk of detection from the windows above he moved closer and quickly rising, turned the knob of the glass door. To his surprise it yielded and without hesitation he entered, closing it softly behind him.

"Careless beggars, to forget there was a lake," he muttered.

Rowland's spirits were fast rising, and his fingers were itching for a grip on something tangible, preferably the Adam's apple of Khodkine-Hochwald. Denied that, anyone else's would do. But a disappointment awaited him here, for the door to the main body of the house was locked. He drew aside into the shelter of the wall and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Not so dull, after all," he said to himself. "But I'll make it, if it takes the butt of an automatic."

Fortunately he was not obliged to resort to that extremity for a French window with a loose catch rewarded his patience.

"It's flat burglary, nothing less," he said with a grin as he crossed the sill and entered the room. It was quite dark here, the only illumination coming from a lamp in an inner room, and he paused a moment to get his bearings and listened. A sound of voices somewhere upstairs. His breath came a little more quickly--the deep bass of a man and he was sure the tones of a feminine reply. Taglitz and his daughter? He would soon find out. It took him a few moments of noiseless investigation to study the plan of the lower floor, the location of the steps which led upstairs and the hall which led to the rear of the house. Then he peered into the lighted room beyond.

It was empty and upon the table lay what remained of a meal, the dishes of which had not yet been cleared away. At the further end of the room was a swinging door which led to the kitchen and Rowland crossed to it, in accordance with a quickly formulated plan to make safe the lower floor, before he went upstairs. But just as he was about to go forward there were sounds of heavy footsteps in the kitchen passage just beyond and he had barely time to flatten himself against the wall when the door was pushed open and a man entered and walked to the table. He was an old man, with bent shoulders, possibly a little deaf, and his breath wheezed like that of a horse with the heaves. It seemed a shame to do it, but there was no time for moral compunctions and stepping quickly behind him Rowland thrust an arm around the fellow's neck and with a knee in the small of his back garrotted him noiselessly and effectually. Then he laid the man upon the floor and with a warning hand on his throat, which he threatened to tighten at the least indication of an outcry, questioned in tense whispers.

"Herr Hochwald left this house half an hour ago?"

There was no reply but a terrible gasp as Taglitz fought for his breath.

"Answer me," growled Rowland with an air of ferocity he was far from feeling. "Answer me, or I'll choke----"

Taglitz raised a feeble hand and tried to move his head, gasping horribly meanwhile.

So Rowland waited an anxious moment fearing that the fellow would die. Then questioned again--

"Where has Herr Hochwald gone?"

Taglitz shook his head.

"I--I--don't--know," he gasped.

Rowland could have shouted for joy. Hochwald!

"Where is your daughter?"

"Gone out--since supper--to visit in Starnberg."

"Who are upstairs?"

The eyes of Taglitz stared, and beneath him, Rowland could feel the man's limbs trembling in terror. But he wouldn't reply, so Rowland's fingers closed gently upon his throat.

"Answer me," he whispered, "or I'll choke you."

Already Taglitz's eyes were starting from his head and Rowland released the pressure.

"Answer," he said sternly.

Taglitz gasped for a few moments of fearful unhappiness then, as Rowland's fingers tightened, held up a feeble hand.

"Who are upstairs?" repeated Rowland.

"Herr--Herr Förster----"

"Who else?"

"Fräulein Korasov."

"At what time did Herr Hochwald reach here?"

"Be-fore supper."

"How long before supper?"

Taglitz paused and Rowland's hand moved toward him.

"An hour," he answered.

Rowland's brain was now acting quickly.

"What did he do with the black bag he brought?"

"I--I don't know."

Rowland's eyes sparkled.

"Did he carry it upstairs?"

The terror in the man's eyes was pitiful and the trembling began anew but Rowland was merciless.

"Answer me." Again the hand threatened.

"Don't--strangle me. I will tell," and as Rowland released him. "He took it

to his room."

"Where is his room?"

"In the wing to the south."

The room which Rowland had been watching when he lay below the rock an hour ago--the shadow had been Hochwald's!

Rowland grinned at the frightened face beneath him while he reached for a napkin upon the table.

"You're a brick, Herr Taglitz," he muttered in English. "That's what you are--a brick. But bricks are silent--and harmless--unless in riotous hands."

"What are--are you"--croaked the prisoner.

The words were stifled by the napkin which Rowland thrust into his mouth. It was a large napkin and the ends tied firmly at the neck and chin made a neat gag. The two other napkins, one around his knees, the other at his elbows behind him completed Rowland's purpose, which was to render one hundred and sixty pounds of potential Prussianism as helpless as Rameses the Second. He rolled Taglitz under the table, assuring himself that the man was in no danger of death, then searched the lower floor for signs of other occupants. But the man had spoken the truth for there was no one else upon the lower floor.

CHAPTER XVI

RESCUE

With a heart beating high Rowland paused at the bottom of the flight of stairs to listen. A man's laugh--Herr Förster's, and in the room with him, Tanya!

This task was to be more difficult and Rowland felt rather pleased that it was to be so, for the impotent old man underneath the dining room table was already weighing on his conscience. Up the stairs he climbed, but he drew his automatic now for no matter what happened he was going to reduce the chances of failure to a minimum.

Again Förster's voice and Tanya's in reply. As his eyes reached the level of the floor he saw the line of light beneath a door upon his left and climbed quickly, approaching the door silently, upon tip-toe. Here he stopped to listen again for a moment while he planned what to do. If the door was locked he would perhaps have to find some other way to get in. Another door from an adjoining room----

But Förster's voice now came to him clearly.

"The Fräulein is unkind. Is it my fault that I am set to guard you? I am only doing my duty."

Then Tanya's voice--a voice he recognized instantly, subdued but angry.

"Your duty may be performed outside. I have no means of escape."

"My orders are strict, Fräulein. Until the return of Herr Hochwald I was not to let you out of my sight, which is gladdened by your beauty. Why so unkind? I must obey."

"I pray you to leave me," came her voice wearily. "I am very tired."

"I am sorry. I pray you lie upon the divan, while with your permission I will smoke a cigarette at the window. No? Then I will sit and again feast my sight upon your loveliness."

"You are a beast----!" said Tanya.

Rowland turned the knob furiously, the door yielded to his foot and flew open with a crash. He sought and found Förster's eyes, covering him with his weapon. The surprise was complete. The man's hands went up above his head as his startled glance searched the obscurity of the doorway behind Rowland as though expecting others, then, seeing no one, his right hand went down to his pocket.

"*Hände Hoch!*" Rowland roared the warning, then fired, as Förster's weapon came into line, fired quickly, once, twice, three times. He felt the cap twitched around on his head, but saw Förster's weapon falter and the bullet crash into the mirror beside him, as the man reeled and then toppled sideways upon the couch, rolling over and down upon the floor, where he lay motionless.

Rowland then turned toward the girl who had risen from her chair and now stood clinging to the table looking at him wide-eyed. She was very white and her lips moved but made no sound, and then he realized that the clothing he wore had effectively disguised him. So he took off his cap and smiled at her cheerfully enough. He saw the recognition spread upon her face as she came forward, both arms extended.

"You, Monsieur Rowlan'!" she whispered in French.

"Tanya!"

Their fingers touched--their hands--and then a stronger impulse urged as he saw the look in the eyes turned up to his. She faltered a moment but he caught her close to him and held her there. If this was the sanctuary she had awaited she had surely found it.

"Tanya," he was whispering. "I've found you. Won't you tell me that you are glad?"

She moved a little in his arms, but he only held her closer.

"Glad. Yes, Monsieur Rowlan', I'm glad," she murmured. "But at first I could not believe----"

"What does it matter so long as I've found you? Your heart, Tanya--have I found that too?"

She made no sound, but her head sank a little lower on his breast. The tip of one ear only was visible in the confusion of her ruddy hair. He kissed it.

"Answer me, Tanya," he insisted. "Your heart. It's that I've come for. Will you give it to me?"

He felt her fingers press his own, felt her slender figure relax in his arms, as she raised her head, while her grave eyes met his in one luminous moment and then were hidden by the long lashes under which two small tears trembled and fell.

[image]

Her grave eyes met his in one luminous moment.

"My heart," he heard her whisper. "That is yours also, Monsieur Rowlan!" Then he kissed her lips.

"Philippe," he corrected gently.

And with a smile she repeated, "Philippe."

"Had you thought that I would come for you?"

"I--I didn't know what to think. It--it seemed impossible that you would dare venture into Germany. I had no hope of anyone else. I have been so frightened for you--so guilty in my conscience----"

"Why?"

"Because it was I who brought you into all this trouble. The vault! The horror of it! Picard reached Shestov in time?"

Rowland laughed, kissed her again and told her what had happened.

"Thank God. I have prayed the Holy Virgin for your safety," she murmured happily.

"I'm hard to get rid of. I've come back to stay, Tanya, for better or for worse." Her fingers pressed his.

"Whatever happens," she whispered, "for better or for worse!"

"You love me----?" he whispered. "Tell me that you do."

She smiled up at him. "It would be strange if I do not--since I am here in your arms. But I am still frightened, Monsieur Ro----"

"Philippe----"

"I am still frightened--you are not hurt?"

"No," he laughed, "I bear a charmed life. It is you who have kept me safe."

"I?"

"The Princess Tatyana--the fairy princess of my childhood who has come to me again." He raised her chin and held her close. "Kiss me again," he whispered, "and make me Immortal."

She obeyed and in the brief moment that they snatched from the whirl of danger lost the world in each other.

The moment passed, and it was Rowland who first straightened, aware of the hazard of their position and of the man upon the floor who groaned and stirred. Rowland bent over him and felt his heart while Tanya, the fleeting color gone from her cheeks again, stood watching.

"Is he---?"

"Thank God--no," said Rowland, coolly, putting Herr Förster's automatic into his own pocket. "But I'll take no chances. He may come around all right and begin shooting, and I mightn't be so lucky next time."

He rose and caught Tanya by the hand as the urgency of his mission took precedence.

"Listen, Tanya, dear. We can't think of him. It was my death or his and I couldn't take a chance. It's war. And it's not pretty. But we can't afford any sentiment now. We haven't a moment to spare. We must move quickly. The meeting of the Central Committee of Bavaria is set for tonight--and I have promised to return. It is gravely important. Hochwald is to be there. He has gone already. I saw him leave in a machine. He is going to play a desperate game and I've just found out what it is. He has recovered the black bag in which you sent the money to the Haupt Bahnhof. It is here somewhere in this house."

"Here? How do you know?"

"I've found out. He brought it here. I suspect that he and the gentleman yonder upon the floor had planned to make away with it to Holland at the first opportunity."

"I can't believe----"

"Everything points to it. He told you that he was going to bring the case up in the Committee--take the disposition of the funds of Nemi out of our hands and have its appropriation made by the Munich Committee itself. Is this not true?"

"Yes, but how did you----"

Rowland grinned in self-gratulation. He was really beginning to have a high opinion of his own intelligence.

"Madame Rochal told me. But if Hochwald had that notion he has changed it now. He is going to that meeting tonight to swear that he has not been able to recover the money--that you have escaped from Germany and taken it with you."

She was trying to understand.

"And that is why he was guarding me so closely--so that I could not get into touch with our friends in Munich!"

"Precisely. Only you and I can save the situation. You who have only to tell the truth. I who will bring into the meeting the suit-case and if I'm not guessing badly show the bank notes themselves. Do you understand?"

Tanya pressed his hand in token of comprehension.

"But how do you know all this?" she asked.

"I can't explain--there isn't time. Förster may come to at any moment and set up a howl. We must search the house. Will you help?"

The rapidity of his extraordinary revelations had bewildered her a little, but with a shudder of horror at the man upon the floor she followed Rowland out into the hall, and with an effort gathered her scattered wits together.

"You would know the bag if you saw it?" he asked. "The black bag of the Bayrischer Hof?"

"Of course."

"It should be in this room in the wing on the south side," he muttered.

And while she wondered at the completeness of his information, she showed him the way down the corridor into the room which Herr Hochwald had occupied. Together they searched it,--in vain. The bag was not there. A methodical search of the house would take time, but there seemed nothing left to do. So Tanya lighted a candle to hunt in the other rooms upon the second floor while Rowland went down the stairs.

"The care-taker--Taglitz," she cried suddenly in alarm.

Rowland grinned. "Don't worry. He's doing his bit under the dining-room table."

She was not yet accustomed to the strange figures of speech of this astounding person to whom she had given her heart. She only knew that she believed in him with all her soul and that if he could be cheerful, all was well. So she searched the rooms across the corridor, finding no bag of any sort. But in a moment she heard a cry from Rowland and went to the head of the stairs, peering over, candle in hand.

"I've found it," he cried. "Is not this it?"

And as she came running down the stairs she identified the black bag at once as the one the porter of the Bayrischer Hof had procured for her.

"Clever," muttered Rowland. "The perfect security of the obvious. Edgar Allan Poe stuff. Hasn't even bothered to hide it. See. It's heavy--not even touched. We've got to be off. Get your hat and coat. Our yacht awaits us at the foot of the steps."

He was in high good humor.

"Yacht!"

"I came by the Lake--in a rowboat. Sorry I haven't a machine. But we must get back to Munich at once."

She hurried up the stair for her bag, coat and hat and in a moment had joined him by the window through which he had entered. He helped her over the sill, exacting a tribute as she passed and then led her down the steps from the terrace and safely installed her in the stern of his stolen craft, in which they were soon pulling away from shore. The hands of the clock in the hall of the house had pointed to ten. Altogether he had been in the Villa Montecori less than an hour. If they hurried there would still be time to make the evening train to Munich.

A few drops of rain fell as they descended from the terrace and in the distance from the heights of the Wetterstein there was a deep bass rumble of thunder. Rowland bent to his oars and rowed along the shore, smiling at the girl who sat opposite him, a little bewildered at the rapidity of events, the swift tumultuous wooing, so soon ended for she knew not what new hazards.

But she could not misconstrue the marks of his preoccupation and in reply to his breathless eager questions she told him of her fear that Hochwald would discover the papers containing his *dossier* and other incriminating data which she had kept concealed in her shirt-waist, but she brought them out to his delight and showed them to him. He was eager too to learn how she had managed to hood-wink him in getting possession of the bank-notes and while he listened she told him how she had accomplished the exchange, loading the suit-case which had contained the treasure with rocks taken from the road. As she finished he suddenly stopped rowing and bent quickly forward over the bag which lay between them.

"What is it,--Philippe?" she asked anxiously.

"A key to the bag!" he cried. "It must be opened."

"A key, why I have it. In my coat, I think. Here!" And after a moment she handed it to him.

Rowland unlocked and tore open the bag and thrust a hand inside, a terrible expression of dismay upon his face, the first she had ever seen there or perhaps would see again.

"Glad I thought of it," he muttered. "It seemed too easy. Rocks! Stones! It's filled with rubbish."

And taking out a stone, he dropped it with a loud splash into the water.

"I must go back," he muttered, taking up his oars in a moment of indecision.

"I must go back."

But instead of doing so at once, he pulled furiously for the pavilion where he found the patient Benz waiting for him.

"Success," he explained. "Fräulein Korasov is here, but the money----

"He has removed it?"

"No. It's in that house. I would take my oath----"

He broke off hurriedly and got out, helping Tanya to the jetty.

"Herr Benz, in a way we are very fortunate. It is very necessary that Fräulein Korasov be taken at once in safe hands to the meeting of the Committee. There is a train you say at half past ten. She must go on it. Are there two men whom you can trust?"

"They are here," said Benz with a smile. "We were just on the point of following you to Monteori Villa."

"Ah, good. Then let them take Fräulein Korasov to Munich. Tanya, these men are your friends and the friends of the cause. You are quite safe with them. Listen attentively and obey these instructions. You will send a wire to George Senf telling of your safety and departure for Munich. The telegraph officer knows and is to be trusted. Senf will have men to meet you at the Haupt Bahnhof. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"Then *au revoir*. I will join you later."

"You are going----?" Tanya asked anxiously.

"Back there," he muttered grimly.

In the darkness he saw the compression of her lips but he stepped into the boat and in a moment all that remained of Tanya was the remembrance of the swift brave touch of her fingers upon his own.

Herr Benz remained at the pavilion to resume his watch of suspense and inaction, but he obeyed orders, aware that the tremendous import of the business in which they were involved had given him a new sense of importance in the great cause. Twenty-five millions of francs! That was enough to spread the gospel throughout all the world!

Rowland lost no time in covering the distance to the villa for caution was now of less importance than time. And in a short while he was crawling in through the French window into the hall. First he examined the bonds of Taglitz and then went quickly up the stairs to the room where Förster lay. The man had recovered consciousness but it was easily to be seen that he was badly hurt.

At the sight of Rowland, he muttered a curse.

"Where is this money, Herr Förster?" he asked coolly.

"Money? And if I knew--do you think--I'd tell you? Go and let me die in peace."

"The black bag which you were told to throw into the middle of the lake is a poor substitute for what I want. The notes are hidden in Herr Hochwald's room, *nicht wahr?*"

Förster was in no condition to dissimulate and his chin gave the slightest twitch upward.

"Ah. That is kind of you---- If you will remain quite still, Herr Förster," continued Rowland, "I will send a Doctor to look after you. In the meanwhile I

will take the liberty of locking the doors."

Lamp in hand he sought the room into which Khodkine had gone. It was luxuriously furnished with the trappings of a man, evidently the abode in times of peace of Count Montefiori himself. First he searched the bathroom, with no results. There was a towel very much soiled upon the rack and another upon the floor which showed traces of some dark stuff.

"Slovenly blighter!" thought Rowland as he went out into the bedroom.

A book-shelf stood in one corner of the room--a likely place? But in a moment with all the volumes strewn upon the floor Rowland had to acknowledge himself mistaken. He tried the bed next, ripping up the mattress and the pillows. The drawers of the bureau were empty, but he took them out one by one and examined the woodwork behind. Next he tested the chairs and couch without success. Then he stopped in disgust to sit down with a cigarette, scratch his head and grin at the frightful disorder he had created. Where--where could Hochwald have hidden the money? He had been in the house less than two hours. Skillful camouflage would require a longer time than that. It must be something more obvious, a simple expedient but clever, worthy of the talents of the gentleman who had locked him in the safe.

He had examined the porcelain stove, a large affair which stood in one corner of the room but there was nothing in it except a few old newspapers. Now as he stared at it, a new thought came to him and lighting his cigarette he touched the fire from the match to the waste paper in the stove. The result was quite surprising, for smoke poured from every aperture, filling the room and driving Rowland to open the window. No draught. He climbed on a chair and lamp in hand, carefully examined the smoke pipe, his long subdued excitement growing again. There was half an inch of rust showing at the lower joint. He then got down from the chair and thrusting in his arm found the flue, at last found the aperture and discovered at once the meaning of the lack of draught, for his fingers met something soft to the touch which they closed on and with some difficulty drew forth. But when he moved the tightly wedged cloth there was a commotion in the smoke pipe above, and as he drew forth the grimy towels which had stopped the hole, a heavy object fell into the smouldering ashes below--an oil-cloth package, the appearance of which was familiar to him--another--another--until in less than ten minutes in a sooty pile upon the rug in an orderly row which tickled his fancy were the twenty-five packages of bank-notes of the Vault of Nemi. He made no mistake this time, examining each one carefully in turn. Triumph! Hurriedly he packed them into the black bag. Clever? It was a wonder that he hadn't thought of it at first--especially after the sooty towels. A childish expedient, a temporary one at best, until Herr Hochwald and Herr Förster could find a way to hide the fortune more effectually.

Rowland now knew that it was he or Förster who had traced the bag to Berghof and had killed him shortly after Berghof and Rowland had parted in Munich! There no time to lose. For the last half hour Rowland hadn't dared to hope that he could be in time to reach the meeting, but now his sense of humor long restrained got the better of him and he laughed outright as he snapped the catch of the bag and lifted his burden. To reach the Committee and formally restore the stolen funds!

But how could he reach Munich now that the last train had gone?

He hurried down the stairs, when, his precious bag beside him, he liberated the gasping Taglitz and when the Prussian sat up bewildered:

"You are to go at once to the village for a doctor for Herr Förster who lies in the front room upstairs, badly wounded----"

"*Zu befehl*," muttered the bewildered man, "if you will but let me loose."

"Thanks, old top--and you might tell Herr Hochwald when you see him that the chimney has been cleaned. *Verstehen sie?*"

"*Zu befehl*," muttered the other.

Rowland hurried forth, crossed the terrace and went carefully down the stone steps and in a few minutes had untied the painter, taken up the oars and pushed off. But as he cleared the terrace wall and came out into view of the house, there was a streak of flame from the upper window and bullets splashed all around him.

"Not so sick as he looked," he muttered, "or maybe it's Rameses the Second."

And then just to show that he was feeling quite happy himself Rowland emptied the rest of his clip at the window when the firing suddenly ceased.

With a laugh he took up his oars and rowed for dear life toward the pavilion and Herr Benz.

That honest man was awaiting him quite disturbed over the sounds of the shots which informed him that Herr Rowland had not come through his adventure without danger.

"Herr Benz, we are going to the meeting of the Central Committee in Munich."

"Tonight? But how?"

"In the ancient automobile which is for hire at such an exorbitant price."

"I don't know---- It is late."

"We shall find it. One can find anything in the world with twenty-five millions of francs."

"Then you have----" The man's words choked him for sheer delight.

Rowland tapped the black bag affectionately and laughed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

It was with a heavy heart that Tanya followed her two companions to the Starnberg Bahnhof. For her escape from the Villa Montefiori, so miraculously accomplished, had for the moment filled her with the hope that the end of her troubles was at hand. And the brief glimpse of happiness she had had in the discovery of the love and loyalty of Philippe Rowland had in their ecstatic hour of union driven from her consciousness all thought of that other allegiance and responsibility to which she had pledged her young life. It came to her with a distinct sense of shock that Philippe more than herself now seemed to feel that responsibility, and accept it as his first duty even above the claims that he had given her upon himself. Grave as were the dangers through which he had passed to save her and deadly as the dangers through which they must still pass as long as they remained in Germany, he had been able to put her aside, to force all thought of their happiness from his mind, in the accomplishment of his graver mission in the cause of Free Government.

It was she who had brought him this responsibility and she loved him for the loyalty with which he fought for a cause not generically his own, but deep in her heart was a sense of failure, of disappointment in this, the greatest hour that could come in a woman's life.

Only four days ago this valiant, careless American had come to her, a new type of being, such as she had never seen before, bringing with him the spirit of joy, unselfishness and honesty, committing himself merely because she had asked it of him, to a cause which as he could well see exposed him to nameless dangers; typical of his great nation across the seas which had now entered the world conflict, pouring into the inferno of German hatred its millions and its men, not for gain or glory, but merely that the world might be free for its brothers in democracy. In her heart she had not dared to admit even to herself that she loved this tall dark-haired stranger, who smiled and then fought and seemed to smile the more when fighting. But she knew now that she had loved him from the first, when he had come half-starved, and asked for bread, his eyes, which could be merry even in suffering, discerning with frank admiration the woman beneath

her robes of Nemi. Nemi to him but a name, its priestess but a woman to whom he had committed himself without question and was now committed for all time. She had loved him then, but more than then or yesterday she loved him now for the unselfishness of a devotion which could dare so much without hope of other reward than she could give him. But the short definite commands at the moment of parting impressed her anew with the sense of intelligence and will which lay beneath his careless manner and the firm strong touch of his fingers bade her still have courage and faith whatever was to happen.

And so, at last, calmly, she took up her burden, ready to accept her share in the dangers of the night as he would wish her to do. She had sent the message to Georg Senf, and with the aid of the telegraph officer at Starnberg, had managed to secure a compartment with her two companions for the short distance to Munich. They were silent men, watchful and obedient, solemnly aware of their responsibilities and at the Haupt Bahnhof which they reached near eleven o'clock hurried her to the cab that Herr Weiss had fortunately provided, for the rain was now falling in torrents. In the cab with the Chief Telegraph Operator beside her, the others following in another vehicle, they were driven to a house in the Schwaiger Strasse where the secret meetings of the Central Committee were held. As Herr Weiss talked to her on the way, she gained for the first time a definite conception of the position the Socialists of Munich had taken, the growing preponderance of the Revolutionary party and the efforts of the so-called Official Socialists, represented by Herr Scheideman, to pour oil upon the troubled waters of rebellion. The government, it seemed, had exhibited a growing anxiety as to the Bavarian propaganda, had interfered by police force in breaking up small meetings and was of course inimical to the work of the Central Committee which as every one in Bavaria knew was growing in influence and power. At the last meeting a month ago, money had been appropriated for the work of the Order of Nemi, to which all of the organizations had contributed, for the work in Russia. It was to the great international society that the Socialists of all creeds looked in their fight against the power of Berlin. Herr Senf was greatly respected for his wisdom and his intelligence, but he was growing old. Herr Rowland was English or American, but to Internationalism what did nationality matter? Herr Weiss had had the honor of meeting him but once, but it was clearly to be seen that here was a leader who could be counted on.

Tanya glowed with pride, not a little astonished too at these words of commendation. She inquired as to the meeting to which they were bound and Herr Weiss looked grave, but told her that in the midst of friends she need have no fear, but that it would be necessary to make their entrance unobtrusive. Rain was pouring in torrents when they reached their destination, a house of ordinary appearance in a small street, beyond the Cornelius Bridge and close by the bor-

ders of the river. The windows were all dark for the blinds were drawn but Herr Weiss got down and, umbrella in hand, conducted the Fräulein with assurance to the door, where he knocked three times and after a careful scrutiny was admitted with their companions. It was with a feeling of some apprehension that Tanya went up the stairs behind him, for brave though she was she could not forget that she was in the heart of the enemy's country and that it was she who had taken the lost bag containing the money that these very men had helped contribute. Suppose that Philippe should not succeed....

Upon the landing of the third floor they were halted at a door and scrutinized again, admitted at last to a suite of three large rooms with wide doors, filled with people, all smoking and listening to a man at the farther end of this improvised hall, who was addressing them. The ceiling was low and smoke-stained, and the atmosphere was heavy with the reek of tobacco, damp clothes and perspiring humanity and the smoky lamps which hung in brackets upon the wall seemed to be struggling in a futile effort to lighten the gloom. Upon the tables here and there were glasses and steins, some half full, some empty of the bitter stuff that they drank as a substitute for the beer they loved. There were several women present, and as the new comers entered, those nearest the door turned and scrutinized Tanya in a moment of curiosity and then again listened to the speaker, a youngish man with dark hair who seemed to have captured their attention. Herr Weiss found Tanya a chair and she sat while the men who had come from Starnberg took places around her.

Though the room was oppressively hot, Tanya shivered, as though with cold, and clasped her hands to keep them from trembling. A feeling of disappointment and depression had come over her. This was the Central Committee of which she had heard so much--that old man at the table in the furthest room near the speaker, Georg Senf, with whom she had corresponded, once a councilor of Nemi and known from one end of Germany to the other. The sordid surroundings, the poverty of the appearance of those nearest her, their pinched, eager faces,--who were these poor half-starved looking wretches who dared oppose the might and majesty of the Prussian Eagles? Their task seemed so hopeless, so futile, and her own mission so uncertain, so fraught with complexity and danger. Her glance sought the door again and again, as she thought of flight, and she scrutinized each newcomer, hoping against hope that it might be Philippe. But at last she grew more tranquil and found herself catching some of the fire, some of the terrible earnestness of those about her, who sat leaning forward on their benches, with their burning eyes turned to the face of the young speaker, their minds responding to his intelligence and devotion in a silence that was eloquent of the sincerity of his appeal. And finally a phrase that he uttered, poignant of a truth that lay near her own heart, caught her attention and forgetting herself she

listened at last as abstracted and as eager as those about her.

"The foes of the people are growing ever bolder, ever more shameless," he cried. "War wastrels, war instigators, war profiteers, those to whom the misery of the people brings power and gain. Such wish no peace. Workmen! Our brothers the Russian proletariat were but a few weeks ago in the same plight, but we know what happened in Russia. Russian labor has crushed Czarism and has gained a democratic republic. And we? Are we still patiently to endure the old poverty, extortion, hunger and murder of the people--the cause of our pain and agony?"

"No! a thousand times no! Quit the workshops and factories. Let labor stop.

"Man of toil, awake from slumber!
Recognize thy growing might!
All the wheels will lose their motion
Without thy strong arm's devotion.

"Down with the war! Down with the Government! Peace! Freedom! Bread!"

It was the sincerity of the man more than what he said that impressed her. He finished amid loud handclaps and calls, followed by the hum and buzz of excitement. From this moment Tanya was one of them. Rough as it was, here was the leaven to permeate the mass and set the nation free.

Senf with a glance at his watch and an anxious look toward the door, next introduced Herr Liederman, who rose, swaying from side to side, his deep bass rumbling to the deeper accompaniment of the storm outside. Tanya, from her sheltered position searched for and found Zoya Rochal, near the speaker's table, her modish hat, rakishly on one side, somewhat out of place, it seemed, in this motley gathering. Herr Hochwald was near the speaker's table too, her companion whispered, but there was no cause for alarm. So Tanya crouched lower, hiding behind the broad back of the man in front of her, aware of the impending crisis, but no longer timid or uncertain. The words of the speaker had given her new courage. Even death, he had said, was a privilege in so great a cause, and she had believed him,--even death--if this was required of her.

Liederman was much in earnest and after a brief peroration, announcing his own stand upon the floor of the Reichstag, a position which he said had carried the cause as far as he dared, he spoke of the work of the Society of Nemi, in the past five years in sending speakers to America, to England, France and Italy, in spreading reading matter in Russia, Austria and Germany. Russia had already cast off her shackles--which other Monarchy would be next to follow? He belonged to the Council of this great international society, had gone to Nemi, the headquarters in Switzerland, to vote the appropriation of a large sum of money

from the treasury of the society which was to be used in aiding to restore order among the Slavic people under a form of government which would be acceptable to all Socialists throughout the world. But Herr Kirylo Ivanitch, the wise and prudent leader of the order, had died, even while the Council was meeting, and another leader had been elected in his place--one Herr Rowland, an American of New York, a young man of extraordinary sagacity and will, deeply committed to the cause, an enemy only of the military caste, the war wastrels, and profiteers, of whom Herr Fenner had spoken, who were also the enemies of all Socialists the world over.

Here Liederman found a moment to glance at Zoya Rochal whose rakish hat bobbed quickly in approval.

"But a disaster has befallen the Order of Nemi, my friends," he went on more quickly. "Its vault containing money in bank-notes of various denominations to the amount of twenty-five millions of francs three days ago was entered and robbed and the money carried away--and into Germany."

A tremendous commotion ran in waves from one end of the assemblage to another. But when Senf rose, rapping for order, a hush fell over the room and utter silence followed.

"I will tell you the facts," Liederman went on. "It is your right to know them, as it was your money and that of others even poorer than yourselves which was given to this cause. Herr Rowland had reason to believe that an attempt would be made to break into the vault during the night after the day in which he came into office. And so he and Fräulein Korasov, who had been the Secretary of Kirylo Ivanitch, decided to remove the money secretly to a place of safety----"

A man in the assemblage had risen and stood quite calmly face to face with Max Liederman. It was Gregory Hochwald. The incisiveness of his voice no less than the words he uttered, startled the room into sudden excitement.

"A place of safety, Herr Liederman," he sneered. "So safe a place, indeed, that it would never have been discovered."

Georg Senf quieted the tumult with an effort.

"Herr Liederman will proceed. Herr Hochwald will be heard in a moment."

"While engaged in this occupation," Liederman went on in a louder tone, "Herr Khodkine, a member of the Council from the Moscow Committee, came upon Herr Rowland and Fräulein Korasov in the vault. What he had come there for is best left to your imagination. An altercation between Herr Rowland and Herr Khodkine followed, and a struggle in which firearms were freely used and Herr Rowland was left for dead at the vault. Madame Rochal and I, hearing the sounds of the explosions, rushed out of the house but by this time Herr Khodkine had fled, taking with him not only the money but Fräulein Korasov as well."

"In whose machine, Herr Liederman?" asked Hochwald, with a laugh.

Zoya Rochal had sprung to her feet.

"In mine, where it had been left just outside the wall."

Her cool tones fell like a naked sword between them.

Hochwald shrugged and sat.

"Silence!" cried Senf.

Liederman finished his testimony without further interruptions until he reached the end, when, leaning forward, he pointed his stubby forefinger at the smiling Hochwald and proclaimed him as the Russian Khodkine. Georg Senf rapped furiously for order, but the roar refused to diminish until the Committeemen saw Hochwald standing upright facing them, his handsome face quite composed, awaiting his opportunity. Not until the disturbance had been quieted did he speak and then very deliberately, his pale eyes passing slowly over the audience as though seeking out those who had cried the loudest against him.

"Friends and brothers," he began, "if you will have patience for a few moments I will tell you what has happened. I am Herr Khodkine the Russian Socialist. I am Herr Hochwald the German Socialist, for in my politics I recognize no nationality--no power but that which comes from the people themselves."

A murmur more encouraging greeted this announcement.

"I am German by birth, but the wrongs of Russia were greater than any you had suffered here. I changed my name and went to Russia to work for the revolutionary party and was one of those who was sent to the train which carried Nicholas Romanoff toward Tsarskoë Seloe and demanded of him in the name of the Russian people his abdication from the throne. I was one of those who conducted him to Tobolsk where he is now imprisoned, a harmless fool, a terrible warning to those who still hope to thwart the will of the people." Herr Hochwald shrugged easily, "You may verify my statements if you please. They are on record. Monsieur Rodzianko can give them to you. As to my loyalty to the cause of Internationalism, I have three times been nominated as Councilor of Nemi and have always served it faithfully and you, my brothers, in a common cause. Therefore---" He turned with a frown at Herr Liederman and raised his voice a note--"Therefore what I say to you must be the truth. Would I come here into your midst a guilty man, to have myself torn to pieces?"

A brief murmur of approbation and cries of "Speak then!"

"I will," he continued in a louder tone. "Herr Liederman has testified that I went to the vault at Nemi and interrupted Herr Rowland and Fräulein Korasov while they were removing the twenty-five millions of francs. He speaks the truth. I did so. Why? Because I suspected this Herr Rowland, an adventurer, a pig of a Yankee, an escaped prisoner from a German camp. You may verify that too, at military headquarters. We do not love the Yankees in Germany, or in Russia, for money alone is their God, their fetich, and they have entered this war to prolong

it that their own capitalists may reap the harvest of our suffering."

Louder cries of approval from those nearest him.

"Wait, my brothers. I am not finished yet. Herr Liederman has said that Herr Rowland suspected his associates of the Council of Nemi--Herr Liederman of Stuttgart, Madame Rochal, your own representative--myself! Herr Liederman has been easily deceived by this plausible American. He meant to take this money away from Europe. *Your* money, my brothers, back to New York and spend it for his own uses. And Fräulein Korasov----

He paused for a moment and lowered his voice slightly.

"Fräulein Korasov was also deceived." He shrugged again and faced his audience, leaning forward, one fist extended. "I did what you would do, my brothers, at the risk of my life. I overpowered this renegade soldier, and imprisoning Fräulein Korasov, brought the money here to Munich to you that you might keep it safely and dispose of it in all honesty in the purpose to which it has been dedicated. Did I do well or no?"

Cries of "*Hoch*," the clapping of hands and the clatter of steins and glasses upon the tables at the sides.

Order was restored with difficulty for it was clear that Herr Hochwald had swayed his hearers.

"I have said little of Fräulein Korasov, who has labored earnestly for Russia. But all women are not wise----

"True!" interrupted a little thin man with a nasal voice upon his left.

"Indeed, few women are wise enough to face alone so grave a responsibility. Fräulein Korasov was ill-guided. She believed in the honesty of this American adventurer, and for a reason which I will give if you demand it, distrusts me. Upon the journey from Nemi to Munich last night she succeeded in taking the bank-notes from the suitcase in which I had placed them--and put them in her own bag, filling the bag I carried with rocks from the road while I was repairing a tire."

"Where is Fräulein Korasov?" thundered a voice.

Tanya shrank down in her seat, trembling, while Herr Weiss spoke words of courage in her ear, which she heard faintly above the tumult.

"In a moment, Fräulein--our time will come. Be brave. No one can harm you."

In the meanwhile Georg Senf had difficulty in restoring order, for the meeting, it seemed, had gotten beyond his control. Question after question was hurled at Herr Hochwald from all parts of the room and he shouted his replies, gaining a greater assurance with every moment and telling a plausible story of Fräulein Korasov's ruse before he discovered his loss in sending the porter Drelich to the Haupt Bahnhof with the money, from which place it had been since taken away

by a confederate--and had vanished.

"Where is Fräulein Korasov?" again thundered the terrible voice.

And Tanya saw its owner now--a huge workman in a blouse, who had risen and stood before Herr Hochwald, both fists clenched in a fury.

"I am a poor man," he cried, "I make what little we have to eat at my house with the labor of these two hands. I have given money--money that might have gone into bread for my children. Where is she? Where is Fräulein Korasov?"

Herr Hochwald faced the man calmly, waiting for him to finish. Then with a hand raised for silence he stood smiling and self-possessed. When the noise had subsided he spoke again.

"You ask me where she is? I tell you that I do not know. She has escaped----"

"How? Why? Did you not----"

"I drove with her in a cab to the Bureau of State Railways where I had sent the machine in which I had arrived from Switzerland. It was my intention to take her somewhere into the country and keep her under guard until the missing bag could be found. But upon the road I was set upon by two men who disarmed and beat me, and Fräulein Korasov went with them. You will see," he finished, pointing to the bruise upon his cheek which Rowland had inflicted. "You will see by this scar that I did not come off unscathed."

He was clever enough to bait his lie with truth and they listened to him and believed. He did not notice, nor did they, the slip of paper which was brought in to Georg Senf, who read the message eagerly and then looked at his watch. The big workman was questioning again.

"Who were those men who attacked you?"

"How should I know," replied Hochwald. "The same who took the suit-case from the Haupt Bahnhof? I do not know. I know nothing more. The money is gone and all trace of Fräulein Korasov who took it."

He stood easily, amid the uproar, that was renewed, smiling again, triumphant. Georg Senf rose in his place, held up his hand.

"Herr Hochwald," he said calmly, and Hochwald faced him. "I would like to ask you a few questions."

Hochwald bowed.

"You speak of two men who attacked you in the automobile. Why did you stop to let them attack you?"

"They stood in the middle of the road and the car slowed down. When it stopped, they sprang upon the running board."

"You were armed?"

"Yes, but they had me covered before I could get my weapon."

"You had a chauffeur?"

"No."

"That is all for the present, Herr Hochwald."

And Hochwald sat down. Senf remained standing and with a sober face commanded silence. Men leaned forward in their seats, wondering what was coming next, aware from the manner of the chairman that the statement of Herr Hochwald was not to go unchallenged. The big man in the blouse at a gesture from Senf took his seat and the crowd became quiet. Hochwald had lighted a cigarette, and sent a quick look of challenge toward Liederman and Zoya Rochal. The venerable chairman began speaking.

"I charge you all," he began, "to remain quiet in your seats, for this is a grave matter and involves the probity of members of this Committee and of our Councilors in the Society of Nemi--which is responsible to us for the funds in its possession. At a late hour evidence has reached me which must be presented to you at once. The witness is a woman who has long labored for a government by the people."

Senf paused a moment, raised his chin and gazed toward the distant end of the suite of rooms. Zoya Rochal nudged Liederman and they both stared at Herr Hochwald, who had turned in his chair, a frown at his brows, his glance swiftly sweeping the row of faces behind him.

"You will remember my instructions," said Senf. "The person who rises from his seat or interrupts the speaker will be ejected from the hall." And then, in a clear tone that reached every one in the rooms,

"I now call Fräulein Tanya Korasov."

Hochwald sprang to his feet but was immediately forced down by the two men who sat next him. There was a low sibilant murmur and all heads were turned as Tanya, followed by Herr Weiss and another, came quickly up the aisle. She bowed to Herr Senf and accepted a chair, which was provided for her, facing the crowd. She was very pale and the faint blue shadows around her eyes showed the strain under which she had labored and the incertitude of the present moment. She clasped and unclasped her hands in a moment of nervousness, but raised her head bravely, at Herr Senf's first question, her lips twisted in a little smile.

"Your name is Tanya Korasov?" asked the Chairman kindly.

"It is."

"You are a Russian?"

"I am."

"For how long were you the Secretary of Kirylo Ivanitch, the Head of the Order of Nemi?"

"Three years."

"You shared his confidence?"

"More than anyone else."

"You knew of the contents of the vault at Nemi?"

"Yes."

"What have you to say as to the character and honesty of the newly elected President of the Order----?"

"I object," Hochwald cried, springing up.

"Silence," roared Senf, like Jove aroused. "Silence! You have testified. If you will not keep your tongue--you will be gagged."

The men beside Hochwald had pulled him down into his seat and those of the crowd nearest him had assumed an angry attitude.

"You will answer my question, Fräulein."

"Herr Rowland," she said clearly, "is the most honest, the most loyal man I have ever known."

"It has been said that you went to the vault to take the money to a place of safety. Whose idea was this? His or yours?"

"Mine, Herr Senf. I had reason to believe that the vault would be entered by those without authority to do so. The combination of the door was in my possession----"

"How----?" The question was stifled upon the lips of Gregory Hochwald for a heavy hand was clapped over his lips while the man beside him held him down.

"Because----" she went on firmly, with a glance at Hochwald, "at the death of Kirylo Ivanitch it was mine to keep in trust for the new Leader of the Order."

"You have heard the testimony of Herr Liederman and Herr Hochwald. Is the account of what happened at the vault true?"

"Substantially, yes."

"And Herr Hochwald managed to escape and force you to go with him and the money in an automobile?"

"Yes."

"You reached the Bayrischer Hof last night, having made the substitution of the money by a ruse?"

"It was the only thing to do," she said, her clear voice slightly raised. "I had to. It was my only chance."

"Your only chance of what?"

"Of saving the money which belonged to the Society."

The ingenuousness of her reply made an excellent impression.

"Then you believed that in Herr Hochwald's hands the money was in danger."

"I knew it," she said simply.

"Silence!" again roared Senf, as an eager murmur went around the room, a sympathetic murmur which showed the shifting temper of the crowd. Once again Herr Hochwald had struggled in the arms of his captors and was again silent. The angry looks of those nearby showed him that he was playing a losing game.

"Herr Hochwald's testimony in regard to the porter Drelich is correct?"

"Yes. Except that I had no confederate. I knew no one in Munich except you, Herr Senf, and I had forgotten your address. I had hoped to recover the bag the next day, but the porter Drelich did not return with the check. Herr Hochwald with Herr Förster entered my room before there was time."

"Who is Herr Förster?"

"An accomplice of Herr Hochwald."

"Were you attacked in the automobile on the way to Starnberg?"

"Oh no. There was no attack."

"And you reached the villa of Count Montefiore quite safely?"

"Oh yes--safely."

"And you were kept a prisoner there by Herr Hochwald, until you were rescued this evening?"

"That is true."

Herr Hochwald's face was now quite unpleasant to see. He was very pale and the dark bruises upon his cheek had become unpleasantly prominent. His hair had been ruffled and his cravat disarranged and altogether he presented a very wild appearance.

Senf glanced at him scornfully and then to Tanya:

"That will be all for the present, Fräulein Korasov. If you will sit yonder----" indicating a chair nearby. Then he raised his voice again so that all might hear and summoned Zoya Rochal.

As she got up there was another movement and murmur in the crowd, quickly suppressed as she began to speak. Madame Rochal knew her audience. Beauty had always been her weapon, but she had always had the good sense to realize that intelligence in this assemblage was the greater asset. She wore no rouge and though she wore her clothing smartly, this was somber and of the plainest.

"Madame Rochal--will you tell the Committee your judgment as to Herr Rowland?"

Her fine teeth showed in the most ingenuous of smiles.

"He is a *man*," she said, with quick enthusiasm in her very slightly foreign accent. "And you may be sure that I know what a man is like."

A nervous laugh from somewhere near the middle room broke the silence and then a ripple of amusement passed over the crowd. Their nervous tension was broken and with their smiles came their sympathy. Zoya Rochal was *en rapport* at once. She was the center of interest and very much enjoying herself.

"A man, yes," said Senf smiling, "but as to his character, his loyalty, honesty, devotion----?"

"I would trust Herr Rowland," she said gravely, "to the very ends of the

world."

"You know then that it is not he who could have taken this money?"

"That would not have been possible. Until this afternoon either Herr Liedermaier or myself was with him constantly."

Herr Senf nodded his head and looked at his watch upon the table. It seemed that he was playing for time.

"You went with Herr Rowland this afternoon to the Haupt Bahnhof with Drelich to present the check and recover the bag?"

"I did. It was not there. Someone had taken it."

"Do you know Herr Berghof?"

"I met him today."

"You have proof that he took the bag?"

"Yes. The woman at the house of Drelich saw him enter the room early in the morning where Drelich lay drunk. She knew Berghof well for he was Drelich's employer."

"And Berghof took the check from the pocket of Drelich while he slept?"

"Yes. She saw him, through the crack of the door into the kitchen."

"Thanks, Madame. That will be all." And then turning to a man near the platform, "Herr Yaeger, if you please."

The Committeeman rose awkwardly and stood.

"You followed this clue this afternoon at my orders?"

"I did."

"You received a report that Herr Berghof had been seen in a small pension near a house in Haidhausen?"

"I did."

"Tell us what happened."

"I went with two men from the factory and watched the place. We saw Herr Hochwald enter the house and----"

"At what time was this?"

"About three o'clock. A short while later they both came out and went away in an automobile together. We tried to follow but it was impossible. We lost them."

"You have heard of Herr Berghof since that time?"

Herr Yaeger paused and looked steadily at Hochwald.

"Herr Berghof was found in the Englischer Garten at half-past five. He had been murdered----!"

"I demand to be heard----"

Hochwald with an effort had thrown the man next him aside, had risen to his feet, crying hoarsely, "I demand to be heard. It is my right----"

"Sit down----!" a hoarse voice shouted, while other hands reached for him. But with a tremendous effort he struggled free and faced them, pale and dishev-

elled, in a desperate effort to regain his lost ground. "Is this an inquisition?" he cried. "Is this the freedom you would give to Germany? You listen to the testimony of my enemies, not even sworn, who conspire to ruin me without permitting me to say one word in defense. Let me speak. It is my right. I demand it."

Herr Senf calmly waved the men aside and Hochwald stood alone in the empty space, breathing hard, his pale eyes glittering with fury as he gazed from one accuser to the other.

"It is a fine story that you tell, Herr Yaeger. What should I know of Herr Berghof? I was not upon this side of the river or near the Englischer Garten but elsewhere, as I can prove by many witnesses. If Herr Berghof has been killed where is the proof that I have killed him? My word is as good as those who testify against me. If I have taken the money, you must find it. Fräulein Korasov says that she had no confederates when you have heard that Herr Rowland whom I found in the very act of robbing the vault of Nemi was today here in Munich. It is he who has taken the money of the Society of Nemi."

Here he turned to Herr Senf and pointed one trembling forefinger.

"It would have been better if you had sent your men in search of this clever scoundrel who has pulled the wool over your eyes, instead of sending them upon a wild goose chase to watch honest men in the rightful pursuit of their business. It is you who have let the Treasure of Nemi slip through your fingers, Herr Senf, for by this time this American has doubtless sent it across the border into Switzerland! Find him, Herr Senf, find him, I say----"

Herr Senf raised his hand. There was a smile upon his face and his eyes eagerly sought the most distant room of the three, where there was a commotion at the door.

Hochwald hesitated--paused--as though already he felt a premonition of new disaster.

"I have found him, Herr Hochwald," cried Senf, with his Jovian smile. "He is here!"

CHAPTER XVIII

VON STROMBERG

The crowd of people turned in their seats or rose and stretched their necks to look over the heads of those who sat behind them. What they saw was a tall,

very much bedraggled individual, with a rain-soaked cap pulled over one eye, but grinning happily and struggling up the narrow aisle, with a disreputable looking black bag which seemed to be very heavy. Hochwald glared at him in a startled way, and at the bag, then turned away laughing softly to himself. But Rowland followed closely by Herr Benz marched past him perspiring and breathless and crashed the bag down upon the speaker's table, with a great gasp of satisfaction. He took off his cap, shook himself like a St. Bernard dog emerging from a bath, then wiped his forehead with a coarse red handkerchief.

"Pfui!" he said cheerfully, "I didn't think I'd ever get here!"

Herr Senf, Liederman and Madame Rochal were crowding around him shaking him by the hand.

"You've found it?" Zoya asked in a low voice in English.

"Surest thing you know," said Rowland with a nod.

And then Senf, "Fräulein Korasov!"

"She is here--quite safe."

Rowland's eyes quickly found Tatyana's and a look passed between them, a look which no one in the room except perhaps Zoya Rochal, could have read, and she did not see it. For Georg Senf was again calling the meeting, to order and the sound of excited voices in controversy diminished to a hum, a whisper and then to silence. Herr Senf was still smiling. He was evidently very happy.

"Herr Rowland has justified our faith and our allegiance," he began, his deep bass ringing with the sounding periods he loved. "You have heard what has been said of him here tonight. If you would believe all you have heard he is both super-man and devil! Fortunately, we are not all so acrimonious as Herr Hochwald. Perhaps that is because we have less at stake. I may tell you that Herr Rowland is neither super-man nor devil but a being like you or me, a citizen of the world, thrust suddenly, in a crisis in its affairs, into the leadership of a great organization which brings our message to all peoples. That he has acquitted himself with skill, good faith and devotion, you shall now see for yourselves and decide, at least for the South German representatives, whether he is not worthy of his high prerogatives."

The citizen of the world sat upon the speaker's table swinging his legs, one arm affectionately around the black bag alongside of him, his highest prerogative at that moment being the use of a pinch of dry tobacco from the pouch of his nearest neighbor, which he was now smoking, exhaling it through his nose luxuriously. He was very contented and chuckled at the angry face of Herr Hochwald in front of him.

"I will not take your time," Herr Senf went on, "to tell you the means by which Herr Rowland discovered the whereabouts of Fräulein Korasov. I will let him inform you how he found her and how he has brought you the Treasure of

Nemi. Herr Rowland."

A murmur of voices pitched in low excited tones, while the occupants of the benches leaned eagerly forward, those in the rear seats crowding and climbing up to see over the shoulders of those in front of them. Rowland stopped swinging his legs and crawled down from the table with evident regret, but he laid the pipe aside and stood up facing them with a smile. A good many things have been said about Phil Rowland's smile, and tonight it was essentially a part of him because he couldn't remember when he had ever been so happy in his life, and he didn't intend to have his evening spoiled (or theirs for that matter) by making a speech. So he began quite clearly and without the slightest hesitation an account of the events of the evening with Herr Benz, culminating in the discovery of Fräulein Korasov in the room upstairs in the villa of Count Montefiori at Starnberg.

"Our friend, Herr Hochwald, had planned well," he finished. "But a vacant house which exhales the odor of a Turkish cigarette is an object of suspicion. The resistance of Herr Förster was unfortunate, but if the thought is any comfort to you, Herr Hochwald, I may tell you that Herr Förster is now in the care of a doctor and I hope for the best. I succeeded in getting what I went for. Fräulein Korasov came to you by the evening train, because her testimony was necessary to your business. I did not know if I could get through in time but thanks to Herr Benz, here I am and what is more to the point here,----" tapping the bag beside him, "here is the money."

Hochwald had risen with a swagger and a smile.

"This man is an impostor," he cried. "He is trying to deceive you. This is the bag which Fräulein Korasov filled with stones. Have you a key, Herr Rowland," he asked maliciously, "that you may open it?"

Rowland laughed.

"Oh yes," he said easily and then significantly, "I found the key, Herr Hochwald--in the chimney!"

Hochwald staggered and leaned upon the back of a chair. His face was ghastly, for Rowland opened the bag and took out the packages one by one, exhibited them and put them on the table.

"I think they are all here," he said. "Twenty-five of them--mostly in thousand franc notes--a thousand in a package. Would you like to count them, Herr Hochwald?"

There was no reply and Rowland put the packages in the bag again.

Herr Hochwald waited in a moment of hesitation and then crossed the room toward a door beyond the speaker's table. But before he reached it, a strange thing happened, for a man rose from a seat upon the left in a corner where he had sat silent and unobtrusive all the evening, a very tall man in a long linen coat with a slouch hat pulled well down over his eyes.

"Stop that man!" he cried in quick, sharp accents. "He is under arrest!"

Hochwald halted and the two men nearest him instinctively caught him by the arms. All eyes were upon the tall man who spoke as though with authority. Georg Senf stared at him. Rowland looked up quickly. But Zoya Rochal turned a startled look in his direction and muttered an exclamation.

"And who are you, sir," asked Senf anxiously.

The tall man threw off his slouch hat and linen coat and revealed a cadaverous figure, clad in the field gray uniform of a Prussian General. His face was thin, wrinkled and yellow and his small eyes were hidden under the thatch of his brows. He pushed forward, those nearest him making way quickly and as he did so they saw the decorations which glittered on his breast.

"The pelican!" whispered Rowland to Zoya Rochal.

A silence had fallen--a hush rather--which differed from that which had been compelled before. It seemed now as though the breath of every person was held in suspense, in awe--or was it terror?

The tall man reached the cleared space by the speaker's table and with a quick gesture of authority motioned Hochwald to return.

Hochwald's eyes were starting from his head, and he seemed unable to move, but suddenly as though obedient to a habit he couldn't resist, he came back to the table and saluted.

"At your orders, Excellency," he stammered and stood at attention.

"I am General von Stromberg," the officer snapped in his crisp staccato as he turned to the crowd. "Let no person leave the room. The house is surrounded by my men. I am in command here."

Of all those within the rooms, only Rowland moved. Behind von Stromberg's back, he seized the black bag from the table, put it down on end upon the floor near Tanya and sat on it.

General von Stromberg folded his arms and glared along the rows of faces which seemed to bleach row by row, under his withering glance. He dominated them--completely, as Rowland hurriedly thought, the living personification of the *Verboten* sign.

"You were permitted to come into these rooms," the General began--"all of you. But none of you," and he gave a sardonic grin, "will be permitted--to go out."

In his long fingers, he swung a silver whistle by a silken cord. He seemed to be playing with it, amusing himself, while he watched their faces.

"I have been very much interested in listening to your speeches and your testimony," he said, his thin voice caressing his words, "it has been very interesting--ve-ry interesting. And now you shall listen to mine. Is there anyone here who denies me the right?"

Silence. Rowland struck a light for his extinguished pipe and the venerable

Senf with some show of spirit spoke up.

"The right of free speech has not been denied us, Excellency."

Von Stromberg glanced at him and very slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"I have heard much of the rights of free speech, much more of the doings of the Bavarian Committee. It has aroused my curiosity. That is why I am here. Some of you are well known to me. Herr Senf, Herr Liederman, Madame Rochal, Herr Fenner, Herr Rowland, I am glad to identify you. I hope you will come to no harm. Perhaps it will surprise you when I say that I am deeply in sympathy with your purpose to recover the money of the International Society of Nemi. So large a sum if misappropriated, if wasted or improperly used, may do an incalculable harm to your own cause--or even to the Fatherland."

He paused and looked around the room. Then he went on amusedly.

"While I have heard many things here tonight which have greatly enlightened me, still I am not disposed to be querulous. We will pass them by. We will forget them. You like to meet and drink your beer and listen to speeches. It is an amusing pastime to find fault with the Government. You are all loyal citizens--oh I am sure of that. But I want very much to put your loyalty to the proof, for the Fatherland now has need of all the support, all the devotion and patriotism of its people."

Where was he leading? The faces of the people before him showed mystification. Zoya Rochal shot a hopeless glance at Rowland, who frowned a little, then crossed his legs and squatted more firmly on the black bag.

At this moment General von Stromberg turned, faced him and their glances met.

If the General's look held a challenge, Herr Rowland could scarcely have been aware of it, for he looked up at him, quite respectfully but with a look of grave inquiry. Von Stromberg turned away.

"Perhaps I do not make myself clear," he went on. "Herr Rowland, the new leader of the Society of Nemi, has brought you back your twenty-five millions of francs that you may vote this appropriation for certain laudable purposes. Perhaps there is some question in your minds as to which purpose is the most desirable. Some of you wish the money to go to Russia, some that it may be used in France, England, Italy and America. A few of you perhaps that it shall be spent in Germany."

He laughed again and toyed with his whistle cord.

"And why not in Germany, my friends? For three years we have been at war with the ring of enemies who are bent upon exterminating us. And there are some among you who would send this money into the countries of our enemies, where it will eventually go into munitions to murder your own brothers? It is unbelievable."

"If your Excellency will permit," Rowland had risen and stood astride like the Colossus of Rhodes with the black suit-case between his legs.

Von Stromberg turned toward him with a frown, impatient at the interruption. But Rowland's tone, though polite was quite firm and his smile charmingly ingenuous. "Your Excellency perhaps is unaware that this money is not the property of this Committee to do with as it chooses. It was contributed by men and women of many nationalities, and is to be kept in trust by the Society which I represent for----"

"A grave responsibility for one so young, Herr Rowland," the General broke in suddenly. And then with much politeness, "Will you permit me to continue?"

Rowland laughed.

"No," he said clearly. "Not if you're going to urge the appropriation of this money for interests with which the Society of Nemi has nothing in common."

At this effrontery those in the front seats gasped, but there was a deep murmur of approval among those at the rear of the room.

General von Stromberg merely smiled.

"I claim the right to speak. I ask for a ruling from the chair. Herr Senf----"

The chairman frowned and rose.

"Excellency," he gasped. "You may speak."

"Thanks. I will not detain you long. Herr Rowland has chosen to bring up the question of the ownership of the money, on the ground of its contribution by people of many nationalities. My reply is that Germany recognizes but two groups of peoples on the earth, its allies and its enemies. In the one case, the money is ours because we have contributed it--in the other it is ours----" he lowered his voice and spoke the words softly--but everyone in the rooms heard him--"because--we take it."

As he finished, he turned slowly and with a significant gesture.

"Herr Rowland will bring the suit-case here--to the table."

Rowland remained immovable but his eyes narrowed and his lips compressed.

"You can hardly expect me to comply with such a request----"

Von Stromberg frowned.

"I don't request, I command," he said sharply.

Rowland's features relaxed again and he burst into a good humored laugh.

"You can't mean it, Excellency. You are too wise. It would lead to trouble--serious trouble----"

Something in Rowland's tone, more than the words themselves, arrested Von Stromberg's attention.

"Trouble!" he repeated. "What trouble?"

"Merely that I might feel compelled to call a revolution," said Rowland pleas-

antly.

Von Stromberg glared at him a moment, his closely cropped bullet-like head, deep between his shoulders. Then suddenly he straightened and a smile twisted at the end of his lips.

"You have a strange sense of humor, Herr Rowland. A revolution! In Germany?" he laughed. "Surely the time is not yet when a polite adventurer from the United States, our most deadly enemy,----"

"*Your* most deadly enemy, Baron von Stromberg," Rowland broke in. And then with a wave of his hand, "Not theirs!"

"Ah, Herr Rowland, I must pay you the tribute of admiration," said the General with a bow of mock humility. "You are a brave man--so brave that it seems a pity to arrest you--to shoot you tonight--as a spy. It would pain me deeply----"

"Not so much as it would me, Herr General," said Rowland, "or those whose cause I represent," he continued, his voice ringing clearly, "for that shot would echo from one end of Germany to the other."

A roar of approval rang through the Hall. "That is true!" roared a voice, and another, "He does not dare!"

General von Stromberg stood erect, quiet, searching out with his keen eyes those members of the Committee who had spoken, waiting for the outbreak to cease. Then when quiet was restored, he shrugged a shoulder and with a quick gesture of his fingers toward Rowland,

"Herr Rowland is there," he said with a smile. "Quite safe, unharmed. That is my reply. He shall remain quite safe, unharmed and go whence he came, to conduct his own business and yours--upon certain conditions. I like this loyalty to his great trust. It is quite admirable." He smiled slowly. "Fortunately this Committee can lift from his shoulders the weight of his responsibility."

"How, Excellency?"

Von Stromberg's smile vanished and he spoke with great deliberateness, each word falling with icy distinctness upon the hush of the crowd.

"By voting this money as I shall direct," he said.

"Your Excellency!" Senf had risen at last to the full majesty of his outraged dignity. "That may not be. I cannot permit such a vote to be taken," he broke in.

The hoarse murmur of approval had risen again and here and there a reckless note of anger punctuated the commotion. General von Stromberg listened coolly, his twisted smile unpleasantly unhumorous.

"Silence!" he snapped, and the noise of voices diminished but did not cease. A rumble of thunder outside added to the din. Electricity was in the air. But Von Stromberg stood upright, swinging his whistle by its silken cord.

"Silence!" he repeated. "I command you!"

The habit of obedience compelled them and they sat silent at last, but there

were angry faces among them.

"My friends, this toy in my fingers is harmless enough. But if I put it to my lips, you will be shot as you sit upon your benches----"

"We can die but once----" broke in a clear high voice almost beside him. Tatyana had risen pale and erect, her hands at her sides and faced him calmly.

"We can die but once," she repeated again more insistently as though she feared he might not have heard.

Von Stromberg stared at her in a moment of silence, then without replying turned to Herr Senf who still stood, trembling with anger.

"You refuse to obey my command?" asked the General.

"I do."

"Then *I* will take the chair," he grinned. "Herr Hochwald! You will take pencil and paper and record the vote." And then raising his voice so that it rang sharply through the rooms.

"It has been moved by Herr General Graf von Stromberg, Privy Councillor of His Majesty the Emperor----"

He paused to grin in self-gratulation--"that the funds of the Society of Nemi at the present moment in the custody of the Central Socialist Revolutionary Committee of Bavaria, be and hereby are appropriated for the uses of the Socialist Party in the Reichstag as his Imperial Majesty may direct."

A death-like silence had now fallen. What did it portend? Rowland stood as though the smile had frozen on his lips, the impudence of this old man was more wonderful than anything he had ever witnessed in his life--one man against two hundred enemies, so sure of himself and of the power that he represented--that there seemed to be not a doubt in his own mind as to the outcome of his audacity. Rowland could have shot him as he stood, but feared. Their leader could not stand alone. Senf was plainly frightened.

It was *their* fight--those others. He set his jaws in a moment of fury. Were they stuffed men--images? Where was the defiance he had heard so brave upon their lips today? Shriveled in their hearts with the terror that made them dumb. He had no definite plan, but he measured the distance to the door behind the table, resolved that if the worst came the money and Tanya would go with him from this room. What a fool he had been to bring it here.

"We will now vote," Von Stromberg's voice broke in again. "Herr Hochwald will record your names as you come forward. He will also take your addresses. We will proceed--the first now--from the right. Herr Fenner----"

The man who a moment ago had swayed Tanya by his fervor and sincerity, rose and came forward slowly.

"I know you very well, Herr Fenner," Von Stromberg was saying, "You have devised a bomb which has proved quite efficient. One of your bombs exploded

last month in the rifle-assembling room at Essen. Fortunately no one was injured. You are an inventor, Herr Fenner. I pray you to invent an excuse for this outrage which will make you innocent."

"Excellency, I----"

The man's face was the color of parchment.

"How do you vote, Herr Fenner?" asked Von Stromberg with a leer. "For the resolution----? Or against it?"

"For----" the man gasped in a half whisper. "I vote for----"

Von Stromberg grinned.

"Good!" he cried jovially. "The force of example will be of inestimable value. Herr Liederman!"

The bulky form of the Socialist approached, his brows twitching, his face suffused with blood.

"Excellency. I am Councilor of the Order of Nemi."

"Max Liederman," cut in the sharp voice. "Socialist-Democrat. Owns property in Stuttgart which may be desired by the Government. Accepted money from the discredited Baron von Weiler in the case of----"

"Excellency, enough!" said Liederman chokingly.

"How do you vote?" thundered Von Stromberg.

"For--Excellency," muttered Liederman.

"Quite right. You see how the wind blows?" And then, with a smile, "Zoya Rochal!"

Madame Rochal approached and her eyes and Rowland's met. The look in his compelled her and she faced the General with desperate coolness.

"Ah, Madame. And you----?"

"I vote No----" she said firmly, her lips compressed, her eyes closed.

"One moment, Madame, in case you should feel any uncertainty--you are a Russian by birth, the daughter of Alexiev Manuilov, a dealer in hides in Odessa. You were a very beautiful child. At the age of seventeen, you ran away from home with an English gambler named----"

"Is my *dossier* necessary, Excellency?" she muttered, with bowed head.

----"named Wishart," he continued relentlessly. "You were next heard of in Constantinople, where you were a part of the household of Mustapha Bey----"

"Excellency----!"

"In Paris, whither you fled with a French rug agent named Dunois, you met the Duc de Noailles----"

"Excellency, I pray that you----"

----"who shot himself, when you ran away to Austria with----"

"For the love of God, Excellency----"

----"with Baron Meyerling of the Embassy. But he repudiated you when he

discovered that his secretary----"

"Excellency, enough. I will vote----"

"How--Madame---?"

Rowland caught one glimpse of her face in this moment of her disgrace. Her glance met his and fell, she seemed in a moment to have grown years older.

"Your vote----?" Von Stromberg laughed. "How--Madame?"

No one heard her reply but General von Stromberg announced quite coolly, "For, Herr Hochwald."

And Zoya Rochal sought her seat, her head bowed, broken and defeated.

Baron von Stromberg was greatly enjoying himself. He leaned against the edge of the table and as each man came up, transfixed him with a look, hypnotic and deeply suggestive of the power of his malice.

But in another moment a change was to come--one of those astonishing shifts of the psychology of a crowd. For one man voted "No" defiantly, the big man in the blouse who had been so violent earlier in the evening.

"Stand aside, Herr Borsch," snapped Von Stromberg.

"With *me*," cried Rowland, joyously. He might have been shouting "Mon-tjoie!" with his famous namesake in defiance of the Saracens.

"And me," cried another nearby, rising from his seat.

"And me----!"

"And me----!"

The crowd had leaped to its feet as though with one accord, the chorus swelled and the rooms rocked with the tumult. Von Stromberg straightened and his right hand which held the whistle moved slowly toward his lips.

Rowland bent over Tanya and whispered something. The movement caught Hochwald's eye.

"Excellency!" he shouted.

As Von Stromberg turned, the whistle already in his lips, he gazed straight into the muzzle of Rowland's automatic.

"Blow, Excellency----"

The shrill whistle and the shot sounded at the same moment. Von Stromberg seemed to stumble and fall. As Hochwald reached for a weapon Borsch fell upon him and bore him to the ground by the sheer weight of his body. Other shots rang out further down the rooms. A woman's scream punctuated the roar. A rush of feet in the hallways outside--doors flew open, and soldiers appeared, the lamplight glinting on helmet, spike and bayonet. At the sight of soldiers there was a roar of fury.

"Down with the soldiers! Kill! The hour of deliverance is here! Kill! Kill!"

There was a crash of glass as one of the lamps went down--another. The rooms were in darkness except for the flashes of the lightning through the dirty

windows. Rowland seized the suit-case and pushed through the crowd which surged toward the door, his arm around Tanya. The soldiers were trying to keep the crowd inside. A furious struggle followed, shots were fired and men fell.

"It is impossible--that way," cried Rowland in Tanya's ear. "Come."

A few had escaped by a rear window which let upon the roof of an adjoining house. Outside, too, above the roar of the thunder, came the sharp note of firearms. But there was no other chance. Rowland went first, stumbling over a figure that had fallen just outside and as he reached the roof there was a flash in the darkness and a bullet crashed into the woodwork of the window. He stood still, sheltering Tanya with the black suit-case, while she descended, his weapon in line, waiting for the flash of lightning to reveal the whereabouts of the sniper. A gleam of light. A German officer at the top of the slanting roof above him, deliberately reloading his weapon. Fortunately the roof had a low pitch. Rowland waited a moment until Tanya was behind him and then clambered upward, the suit-case clasped in front of him, firing as he went. The officer toppled, caught at the chimney-breast beside him, missed it, and falling, slid head first down the slippery roof and disappeared. Rowland gained the top, a flat space buttressed by chimneys which adjoined a larger building upon the right, hauled Tanya up beside him and then hurried along toward its further end, hoping to find a roof adjoining. But as he did so, his toe struck a projection and he fell sprawling, just as two soldiers clambered up and began firing. Rowland heard Tanya's cry of dismay.

"All right," he cried reassuringly. "The other chimney--hide."

She obeyed. And Rowland waited until the nearest soldier had almost reached him when with the last shot in his weapon he fired point blank into his body. The man crashed down, his rifle falling just beside Rowland's hand. With a cry of joy he seized it and rose. The other man fired. Rowland felt the bullet pass through his clothing somewhere and was surprised that he felt no pain and did not fall. Instead he found himself erect, standing quite firmly upon his feet, his keen gaze seeking the point of the bayonet of his adversary. This was a game he knew. He aimed at the approaching figure and pulled the trigger of his rifle but there was only a harmless click. The chamber was empty. But the other man had not fired again. A flash of lightning revealed him--a mere boy, very pale and uncertain. It seemed a pity--he was so young.

And then he heard the boy's voice.

"*Kamerad!*" it said. "*Kamerad!*"

And Rowland waited a moment.

"Hold up your hands."

The boy obeyed, whimpering.

"I do not want to kill my own people," he said.

"You are sure?"

"Yes, yes."

"Good. Nor do I." And then, after a moment more, "Go thou then and tell them that the roof is cleared."

In a moment Rowland had dropped the rifle and joined Tanya by the chimney.

"You're not hurt?" she whispered in a lull of the storm.

"No, I think not. And you?"

She reassured him quickly.

"Thank God for that."

The rain was still pouring in torrents. Behind them the tumult of the baited crowd, but upon the roof upon which they hid there was no one. The boy had been true to his word.

He took the weapon of Herr Förster which he had not had time to draw from his other pocket, picked up the suit-case and looked around.

"Come," he said. "There must be some way out of this."

CHAPTER XIX

A SAMARITAN

Beyond them at one side was another roof, and beyond it again, through the driving storm they could see the chimneys of others. Rowland slid down to the lower level. Tanya handed him the suitcase and in a moment in obedience to his orders she had swung herself over the edge of the eaves and into his arms.

But their situation was precarious for the new roof had a deeper pitch and the tiles were loose, but they climbed to its peak, along which they made their way on their hands and knees, Rowland leading and dragging their precious booty toward a group of chimneys fifty or sixty feet beyond, a defensible position should their means of escape be discovered. They reached it at last, their clothes and fingers torn, and halted a moment here, while Rowland reloaded his automatic while he watched the dim profile of the house above them.

"It was horrible--I can never forget----," Tanya was whispering. "Like rats in a trap. That dreadful man!"

"I shot. There was nothing else to do. But I could swear I missed him--the uncertain light--the crowd all about----"

"But he fell--I saw him----"

"Yes," dubiously, "but they say he has as many lives as a cat. Sh!" he whispered suddenly.

They crouched lower in the darkness, while Rowland peered up at the dim shapes along the roof of the building from which they had descended. Two soldiers--for he could see the rifles in their hands--but they looked down upon the sloping roof, exchanged a few words and then, evidently changing their minds, disappeared again. The roar of the storm had now drowned all other sounds, for the shooting had ceased, but a dull glow now appeared defining the window from which they had escaped. The glow was too red for lamp light, and then a smell of smoke was borne down toward them upon the storm. Fire! Rowland pointed and Tanya saw.

"The lamps," he said. "Unless they put it out it will soon be so light that we can be seen from the street. Risky footing in the dark, but we've got to chance it," he said grimly. "Can you follow?"

"Try me," she said bravely.

He pressed her hand, caught up the suit-case, and they went on, now at a higher elevation, now at a lower one, until Rowland stopped again by another group of chimneys to rest and listen.

"I don't know how far these roofs go, but there's a river over here somewhere. There's a dormer window just beyond. We can't go much further. We'll have to slip in and take a chance. Are you all right?"

"Oh, yes."

In a lull of the storm they heard loud outcries from the now distant hall. Smoke and sparks were coming from the windows, and at last a tongue of flame shot upward.

"If we can get down----"

But the descent was precarious, for this roof was steeper than the others. In the street below the eaves they now heard the rumble of heavy wheels upon the cobbles, the clang of bells and shouts of excitement.

"If we can reach the street we might slip away in the confusion," Rowland muttered, and had already begun the dangerous descent to the roof of the dormer window when a word of warning from Tanya made him pause.

"Someone--is following us," she whispered.

Rowland lodged the suit-case in the angle by the chimney and turned, weapon in hand, peering into the darkness. The glow of the sparks and flame from the burning building now shed a faint illumination along the wet roofs and he made out a figure crawling toward them. He waited a moment until the figure reached the gable of the house on which they sat when he lowered his automatic and frowned in uncertainty.

"I can't make out----" he whispered. And then in a guarded tone, "Who's there?"

There was a moment's pause and then a faint voice came to them--a woman's voice.

"Philippe!"

With an exclamation, Rowland slipped the weapon in his pocket and crawled back along the roof.

"Philippe--thank God!" And then faintly, "You must help me. I--I am--hurt----"

"Zoya!"

He helped her up and along the roof while she clung to him in weakness and in terror, but he managed to reach the safety of the chimneys, where Tanya helped him support her.

"You are wounded?" he whispered.

"I saw you go. I tried to follow. Someone shot at me in the dark. I fell.... Then I knew that I--I must go on and--and when the soldiers went--I crept--up--the roof--I don't know how. In the glow of the fire I saw you and--and came. But I am so dizzy----"

She stared down into the dark chasms on either side and then her head fell sideways on Tanya's shoulder.

"She has fainted," muttered Rowland.

"We must get her down there in some way," said Tanya bravely.

"Stay where you are. I will see."

And putting the suit-case beside him he sat and went carefully down to the roof of the dormer window, where he lodged the suit-case again and then slid down. There was a broad ledge here and he crouched, peering around into the window of the room beneath. It was dark inside but the window was open. There was no time to spare, so, weapon in hand, he entered without ceremony. His matches were wet and he had no means of making a light, but he felt around with his hands and found a door, which he opened cautiously. There was a dim light in the hall and by its light he made out the objects within the shabby room, a trunk, two beds, a bureau and wash-stand. One of the two beds had been occupied and the disorder of the room indicated that it had been suddenly deserted.

Rowland scratched his head in a moment of uncertainty, and then closed the door and locked it.

"Sorry, old top," he muttered, "but our need is greater than yours."

As he emerged the flames from the burning building had burst through the roof and the figures of Tanya and Madame Rochal by the chimney were deeply etched in silhouette against the glow of the heavens. The downpour had ceased and only a slight drizzle remained of the storm which had been so friendly to them.

Even now, if anyone chose to look upward they could see. And so he crouched and crawled up again.

"It's got to be managed some way," he muttered to Tanya. "Come."

But she shook her head.

"I will follow," she said firmly. "See, she has revived a little."

With words of encouragement they got Madame Rochal upright and the perilous descent began, Rowland with one arm around her, the other hand clinging to a projection of the roof. They moved slowly down, Rowland fearing another fainting spell which might cause her to lose her balance, but the assurance of her companion gave her the use of the last remnants of her strength, and they reached the ledge in safety, where she clung to the woodwork of the window while Rowland entered and then half-dragged, half-lifted her within. He carried her then to the couch upon which he laid her and then returned for Tanya. But just outside the window he met her coming down alone and in a moment had her in his arms and safe with the suit-case within the room.

But safe for how long? The security of their hiding place depended upon their unknown host or hostess. What sort of a house was this and who was the occupant of the disordered couch? While Tanya knelt beside Madame Rochal, unfastening her clothing and trying to learn the extent of her injuries, Rowland cautiously unlocked the door and peered out down the stairs. A light burned on a lower floor, showing a shabby hallway with torn wall-paper, a broken chair or two, but no person in sight. Then he made out the sound of voices below, talking excitedly, and he realized that the commotions of the street had entered here. Outside he could still hear the hoarse cries of the men in the street. The story of the raiding of the hall above must now have reached all the neighborhood.

Leaving the door open, he returned to the bedside of Zoya Rochal. In this new care so suddenly thrown upon her, Tanya had forgotten her own danger and Rowland's. She had loosened Madame Rochal's clothing, and had found the injury, a flesh wound in the side below the arm-pit.

To leave Zoya there--to go down with Tanya and lose themselves in the crowd outside--the thought occurred to Rowland, but when Tanya spoke, he dismissed it.

"We must do something--make a bandage, get some water, some restoratives," she whispered. "We can't let her die."

"But----"

"We'll be discovered by the one who sleeps here sooner or later. We must take our chances," she said quietly.

She shamed him. From what new source had she drawn the moral and physical courage to meet this new test of her womanhood? Even Rowland was weary and anxious, yet here beside him undismayed by her night of terror sat this

woman he loved, calmly ministering to one who, though perhaps not her enemy, had tonight been proclaimed of a class beyond the pale of decent women. He could not know that perhaps it was Zoya's very frailty that had given Tanya strength. And yet to know what sort of woman she was he had only to remember Tanya there in the hall of the committee, standing pale but fearless while she defied the terrible von Stromberg. This was the girl who now commanded the situation, the mistress of his will as well as his heart. He wanted to tell her all that he thought of her, to live for another space this one joyous moment of communion, so soon broken; but her tone was urgent. There was nothing but to obey.

He had managed at last to find matches and a candle which he lighted and placed upon the dressing stand at the head of the bed.

"Now," said Tanya, "there must be water in the pitcher--tear the sheet on the other bed for a bandage."

He was moving to obey when the door of the room was pushed quietly open and a man carrying a lamp in his hand stood upon the threshold, gaping with astonishment. He was a very tall man, with a long neck and a face tanned a deep brown which brought into contrast the whiteness of his hair. He was collarless and very shabby, and peered first at Rowland, then at Tanya, and the figure on the bed, as though he couldn't bring himself to believe the evidence of his eyes. But Rowland's quiet tones cut the silence clearly.

"Come in, please--and shut the door."

It was not until then that he saw the weapon in Rowland's hand, started a little,--then obeyed--still silent and not a little perturbed. But to make sure of him Rowland crossed to the door behind him and locked it. Still unable to comprehend, the tall man stared at the dark figure on his bed and at the girl kneeling beside it, for Tanya had turned and was looking up at him in passionate appeal.

"We escaped over the roofs from the hall--where the fire is," said Rowland quickly. "The woman on the bed has been shot. If you are friendly you will help us. Otherwise----" He frowned and fingered his weapon. suggestively.

"A friend---yes," said the tall man. "It is horrible, what has happened yonder. I would have gone to help, but the soldiers have cleared the streets. You need have no doubt of me, my friend," he said with a smile. "You may put your weapon away."

His voice was deep, resonant and suggestive of a life in the open. He spoke German with a slight Czech accent and even in his shabby surroundings had an air of distinction not to be denied. Now that his astonishment was gone, he went forward and put the lamp on the dressing stand and turned facing Rowland, who had put his pistol into his pocket and was examining their host with growing confidence.

"The woman there needs attention," said Rowland. "She has bled a great

deal--some clean bandages and medicine. Can you get them?"

"Yes. It is little enough. I will help and thank God for the chance. I have some skill--if you will permit me----"

Rowland nodded and Tanya moved aside and took up the lamp as the man knelt beside the bed and bent over the prostrate figure. As Tanya brought the lamp over the bed, she saw him start back and then peer more closely at the features of Madame Rochal.

"God in Heaven!" his deep tones muttered. "You!"

Emotion mastered him and his voice vibrated as he asked,

"This woman--how did she come here?"

"She was a member of the committee which met there. You know what happened--the soldiers came. She was shot in escaping. You know who----?"

Their host held up his hand.

"No matter what I know. But I must save her. I must--must----"

With Rowland's help, he turned the injured woman, his long bony fingers quickly exposing the wound. The bullet had entered the side below the arm, and had passed through the muscles at the back.

"It is not so bad as I supposed," he muttered. "She has lost much blood but the hemorrhage has ceased."

He rose and crossed quickly to the washstand and brought a basin full of water and a clean towel.

"If you will wash the wound, Fräulein, I will get some dry clothing and medicine."

Rowland opened the door and their host hurried out, while Tanya obeyed his injunctions.

"He knew her," said Rowland. "You saw----?"

"Yes."

"What do you make of him?"

"He has been born to better things--gentle once, gentle always. You need have no fear."

"It's of you, Tanya, that I'm thinking. There has been too much----"

"We are still free," she smiled up at him, "still victorious. I am no weakling, Philippe."

"But we are still in great danger. I wouldn't mind taking a chance in the street alone, but with you----"

"Where would you go?" she asked quietly.

"To Georg Senf, to Yaeger--to Weiss--to----"

"To arrest," she said with a smile. "We don't know what has happened. There was fighting--shooting. Georg Senf may be dead. If the streets are cleared the soldiers are in command, that is certain. We can gain nothing by going now."

"But they will search this house----"

"Why? The soldiers were on guard upon the roofs. They missed us in the darkness. Those frightful roofs!" She glanced at Zoya. "How she ever managed to follow us!"

"Poor Zoya!" he said, and she understood what he meant. And then after a pause, "But we have another duty."

Her look questioned.

"To get out of Germany, with this!" and he kicked the black bag that had been the cause of all their troubles.

"Yes," she said quietly, with a smile. "Of course. But something will happen to help us. I'm sure of it. Wait."

Her courage was of the quiet kind, patient, enduring, and her words re-proved the hot impulses that were surging up against his own better judgment. Soft footsteps on the stair outside and the tall man entered again, bringing some clean soft linen, a nightdress, and several bottles. Between them they managed to remove her outer clothing and then Tanya completed the arrangements for her comfort. The stranger set to work at once, silently anointing and bandaging the injury. The sting of the iodine as it entered the wound aroused her and she opened her eyes and looked around the room, meeting Rowland's eyes.

"Philippe!" she whispered softly.

Rowland, holding the lamp, felt rather than saw the slight tilt of Tanya's head upward and noticed the face of the tall man who turned his gaze up to Rowland's in grave inquiry.

"You are quite safe, Zoya," he found himself saying, "and in good hands. You will sleep now."

They gave her an opiate, and, with a weak smile, she obeyed him.

The dawn was creeping up over the roof-tops outside and searched the dark shadows of the room. Their host had risen, tall and gaunt, staring down at the woman on the couch. His white hair had deceived them, and in the pale light of day they could see that he was not as old as he had seemed to be, a man not far from forty. The lines in his cheeks were deeply graven as though seared by sudden misfortune, but his somber eyes burned steadily and the smile which parted his lips as he looked at his handiwork was very gentle and very sweet. For the moment, it seemed that he had forgotten Rowland and Tanya--in the spell of some memory that was not all bitterness.

The early morning air was chill and for nearly two hours Tanya had sat in her drenched clothing. Her sneeze, which she tried to repress, awoke their host from his reverie with a start.

"Fräulein, I am sorry my poor chamber affords so little of comfort. But you must sleep and have dry clothing. I am afraid, Herr----" he paused.

"Rowland."

"I am afraid, Herr Rowland, that I must take Frau Nisko into our confidence."

"Who is Frau Nisko?"

"The amiable person who lets out these palatial lodgings," he said with a smile and an expressive gesture of the hand. "A compatriot of mine--Bohemian," he explained. "A lover of liberty and a woman to be trusted."

"We can pay well for silence."

"She is poor--as I am, God knows, but there are some things, Herr Rowland," he finished gently, "that may not be bought with money."

Rowland felt the reproof under this strange creature's gentleness, and took him by the hand in token of understanding.

"You know that I cannot thank you. Necessity knows no law. We are desperate--hunted! And if found will be shot----"

"They shall not find you--I pledge you my honor. I too owe you something---" his gaze wandered to the figure on the couch. "And perhaps I can pay."

"There is then no danger of a search?"

"I think not. The streets are now cleared. There are soldiers just outside keeping the lodgers in. The scene of the horror is several hundred meters away from here. How you managed to cross the roofs so far--with *her*----!" And then moving toward the door, "It shall be arranged. There is another room just here in the corridor. I will return."

The wounded woman was now sleeping heavily. For the first time since they had left Starnberg See Rowland and Tanya were alone with each other.

"Are you very tired?" he asked gently as he took her in his arms.

"A little," she sighed, smiling, "but I'm very happy."

He held her more closely. "And I. You've got more sand than any woman I have ever known."

"Brave?" she smiled. "I'm afraid--not. I----"

Her teeth chattered with the chill and reaction which he knew must come. And suddenly she sank more deeply into the shelter of his arms, her shoulders shaking.

"Tanya----!"

She reassured him with a laugh. "Oh, don't worry. I'm not going--to give--way!"

"Sh--dear. Presently you shall sleep. Tomorrow--today--we shall devise something. You love me?"

"As much as possible--in--four days,--my Philippe."

"I have loved you all my life, Princess Tatyana," he laughed.

"And yet you--you do not even know my name."

"I know what it's going to be."

"You have no curiosity?"

"You're a princess, you said----!"

She nodded. "My name is Samarov."

"I like Tatyana better."

"What does it matter?"

"Nothing. We have looked death in the eyes, we have won life--together."

"God grant that may be true."

He kissed her gently and looked at the recumbent figure on the couch.

"And if they find us here----?" she questioned.

"We have still this hour----" he whispered.

They sprang apart as the tall man entered. He looked at them for a moment in silence and then a smile broke over his gaunt face.

"So," he said, "I ask pardon. It has been arranged. The room is ready, Fräulein. A night-gown upon the bed. Your clothing shall be dried while you sleep. If Herr Rowland will permit----"

He stood beside the door bowing and following the direction of his gesture, Tanya went out into the hallway to the room adjoining, where Frau Nisko was awaiting her. In a moment his host returned and hunted about in the drawers of the old dressing stand.

"You, too, Herr Rowland--some dry clothes----"

"I'm dry already. It doesn't matter. To a soldier a little dampness----"

"A soldier----?"

"Of the French Legion----"

"Here!"

And briefly Rowland told him of the strange events that had brought him into Germany.

"The Society of Nemi. I have heard--And you----?"

"Its leader--but in Germany--merely an American, a spy--rifle-fodder. You understand. I've told you all--because I trust you, Herr----"

Rowland paused suggestively, then waited.

"My name?" the tall man said at last--"I am called Markov. Perhaps you will not believe that I was once a gentleman. But that matters nothing. I was taken ill with tubercular trouble and knew that I must live in the open air." He laughed a little bitterly. "My occupation will amuse you. I travel with a hurdy-gurdy, a piano organ drawn by my excellent Fra Umberto from one end of Germany and Austria to the other."

"And who is Fra Umberto?" asked Rowland.

"A donkey, sir, the best, the only friend I ever had, patient, enduring, honest, amiable, who asks nothing, borrows no money and does what I ask of him without question. What more could one ask of friendship than that?"

Rowland laughed.

"Nothing, God knows. And where is he, your friend?"

"In the stable nearby, with my precious instrument of torture. The Germans are a musical race. In the cities they chase me away but in the country--all Summer long I gathered in the pfennigs, a harvest which lasts me through the winter--here in this palatial habitation. But I am happy for my trunk is full of books. I read, I study, I dream----"

Herr Markov put his hand to his brow, gazed at the silent figure of Zoya Rochal for a moment and then with an abrupt gesture of abnegation, rose and closed the door.

"I--I am selfish keeping you awake with my story, Herr Rowland. You have been through much. We cannot tell what may come. You must rest. Take off your coat at least--a dry, warm garment--and sleep."

"But you--Herr Markov----?"

"I sleep little. It's a farce even to lie down. I will watch, Herr Rowland." And as the American protested he pushed him gently toward the vacant cot. "It is sometimes occupied by another--but it is quite clean. *Bitte*, Herr Rowland."

And so with a sigh Rowland obeyed. But it was a long while before he slept for the events of the day and night had brought high nervous tension which refused to diminish. But at last, admitting the wisdom of his strange host, Rowland relaxed and closed his eyes. The last waking memory he had was of Markov, sitting in the chair beside Zoya's bed, bending forward intently, like a mother at the bedside of a sick child.

CHAPTER XX

ESCAPE

Rowland slept lightly and was awakened by a sound overhead, a scuffling upon the tiles of the roof. Herr Markov already stood upright by the window, listening. Rowland started, wide awake at once, but a gesture from his host halted him.

"Under the couch," he whispered, "the covers will hide you."

And Rowland obeyed quickly, aware that the sound of shots would soon have the hornets about their ears.

Whoever was upon the roof was slowly sliding down to the window. Soldiers! They had followed the wounded Zoya. Even the rain...?

He heard Herr Markov's voice out of the window.

"What the devil do you do up there?"

Another voice replied, and then questioned, for he heard Markov's reply.

"In here? What should anyone do in here?"

The other voice came nearer at the window-opening itself--a young voice, sharp, peremptory.

"What is this house?"

"A lodging house, Herr Lieutenant. You see--of the poorer class."

"Who keeps it?"

"Frau Nisko, Herr Lieutenant. It is number sixteen."

"No one entered by this window last night?"

"Last night! By this window!" in excellent bewilderment. "No, Herr Lieutenant. That would have been impossible. Besides, you may see for yourself--who would wish to enter here?"

"Someone may have passed through while you slept."

"I was awake all night with my wife yonder, who is very ill of tuberculosis."

"Ah--then you are certain?"

"Positive--but if the Herr Lieutenant will enter----?"

Rowland wondered at Herr Markov's temerity--also wondered what he would do if the Herr Lieutenant accepted the invitation. But fortunately the ingenuousness of Herr Markov had stopped the gap. The young officer withdrew and presently they heard his boots scrambling up the tiles overhead.

"Pfui!" said Markov, wiping the sweat from his brow as Rowland peeped out. "That was a close shave, Herr Rowland. He would have entered if I had not invited him to. Human nature is the great paradox. It always desires that which is denied it and scorns that which is proffered. Had the Herr Lieutenant been older the thing would have been difficult."

Rowland crawled out from his place of concealment and examined his host with a new interest--a new respect. An attic philosopher! He grasped Herr Markov by the hand.

"A friend indeed!" he murmured. "And what would you have done if he had come in."

Herr Markov shrugged. "I do not know. Waited, perhaps. He might have gone again." He glanced at Madame Rochal and set his jaws. "My hands are very strong, Herr Rowland. Besides, I have pledged you my word."

"It is a fearful danger into which I have brought you----"

"I have welcomed it--you need not worry."

"But if they come again----?"

"I think they will be satisfied with this. But it will not do to stay here too long. We will see. At present, since you are awake, I will go down and make some

inquiries."

The sun had been up many hours, a brilliant summer day of blue and gold. Rowland cautiously brought his head up to the level of the window-sill, looking out, but the houses upon the opposite side of the street were small and this window was in no danger of observation. So he straightened and went over to Zoya, for the sound of voices had awakened her and she had turned on her bed. He felt her pulse and at the light touch of his fingers she turned her head and opened her eyes.

"Ah, Philippe," she sighed gently.

"You are feeling better?" he asked cheerfully.

"I--I am not sure," she murmured. "I ache--how I ache--from head to foot--Oh--!" She tried to move her bandaged shoulder and gasped, "I remember--him!"

"You are quite safe," he said reassuringly, "in the hands of friends."

"Safe--no, not safe, Philippe----" she muttered, "not safe while *he* is alive."

"Who?"

"Von Stromberg." She started up feverishly. "He fell. But as I went out of the window, I--I saw him rise. It--it is impossible to escape him----"

Her voice gained strength and Rowland soothed her gently.

"You must be quiet, Zoya. They have been here--over the roofs--but they went away again. They won't come back----"

"But he--he--is--is the devil incarnate----"

Her eyes stared at the wall above her--as at a specter of their enemy. The terror of last night had come over her again.

"Quite so. I agree with you. But I'm no longer alarmed. Why should you be? A swallow of water--and then sleep again, Zoya. You're going to be quite all right."

"I was shot----"

"Through the arm-pit--nothing serious. A few days and----"

"Whose room is this?" she asked suddenly, looking round at the bare walls and shabby furniture.

"A friend's. A Samaritan, Zoya. He has nursed you while I slept--a stranger----"

"Oh," she gave a little shrug and turned her face toward the wall. He poured out a glass of water and brought it to her. She drank it eagerly and then sank back with a sigh.

"A devil incarnate," she repeated. "And the money----?" she asked suddenly.

"Here," he laughed. "Like a millstone around my neck."

"You have it still--here?"

"Well, rather. But I wish it were in Jericho."

"You are a man, *mon Phili*----"

She had thrown her sound arm impulsively over his, but at a sudden sharp memory she withdrew it and turned her head toward the wall. There was a moment of silence and then he heard her voice, hard, expressionless.

"I wanted to--to vote as you wished, but--but I betrayed you. His eyes were burning me, his words--scorching--my--my very soul." And then, almost in a whisper, "You heard what he said----"

"What does it matter now?" he asked softly.

"He scourged me," she whispered again, "stripped me bare for those animals to look at. If he had killed me--if this shot had been a few inches lower----"

"But it isn't," said Rowland cheerfully. "Buck up, Zoya. The worst is yet to come. I hoped the old pelican was dead, but we'll outwit him--some way."

She turned, smiled feebly and gave him her hand again.

"You forgive me?" she asked.

"Forgive--what for? The thing was hopeless from the beginning. I was a fool to try to start anything, but it made me sore--to see the old rooster walk off with this money--under my very eyes--and he hasn't got it yet," he finished boyishly.

"What are you going to do?"

Rowland rose and put the glass on the washstand.

"I'm going to get out of here if you don't stop talking--at once--or tell your nurse."

"My nurse?"

"The Johnny whose bed you're lying on. *He'll* make you keep quiet."

"What will he do?"

"Give you more dope, for one thing----"

A knock upon the door, and Tanya, clad in a gray dressing gown much too large for her, entered and came quietly forward. Her glance met Rowland's as she gave him her hand. She looked a little tired but smiled as she knelt beside the bed and took one of Zoya's hands in both of hers.

"You are better, Madame?" she inquired.

"I think so. You are very good." The tones were listless--indifferent.

"We are safe for the present," said Tanya. "The soldiers at the front of the house have been withdrawn."

"Who told you this?" asked Rowland quickly.

"Frau Nisko. She answered all their questions satisfactorily."

Zoya Rochal stirred uneasily.

"Nevertheless," she said hopelessly, "they will find us."

"Don't lose courage."

"He never fails. I know."

"Who?" asked Tanya.

"Von Stromberg," she muttered. "He sees everything, knows everything."

You can't escape."

Rowland shrugged.

"We're at least willing to try. And now you must sleep again, Zoya. Herr Markov----"

He paused, for Zoya started at the sound of the name, and just then the door opened and Zoya's gaze turned toward it quickly. He saw her eyes look, then stare, closing perplexedly.

"She is awake?" Herr Markov asked.

At the sound of his voice Zoya moved upon her pillow and opened her eyes again. But their strange host had come forward and laid his hand quietly over hers.

"It is I, Mariana--Matthias Markov. The good God has sent you to me----"

"Matthias!" she gasped, still looking at him.

He bowed his head gravely and raised her hand to his lips, but at the contact she closed her eyes and lay back, breathing deeply.

Tanya had taken Rowland by the hand and led him out of the room into her own.

"His moment----" she whispered. "Let him have it--with her--alone."

There was much to say and in a few words Tanya told him what Frau Nisko had learned about the disastrous results of the riot in the hall. There had been shooting--six men and a woman had been killed, and many wounded and burned in the hall and on the stairs. Four soldiers were dead, amongst them an officer. There had been fighting in the streets but the soldiers, where they could, had permitted many to escape. Order had not been restored until the early hours of the morning, when fresh companies of troops had arrived and were now patrolling the neighborhood.

"And Von Stromberg----?"

"No one knows--he has not been seen."

"Hochwald----?"

"He either--Senf, Liederman, Fenner, Weiss--were taken away----"

"Benz?"

"I don't know. He may have escaped----"

Rowland paced the floor thoughtfully.

"We can't stay here, Tanya," he said at last.

"I know----"

"It means prison or worse for Herr Markov and Frau Nisko. We've got to do something."

"But Madame Rochal----"

He frowned. "I'm thinking of her. She voted as Von Stromberg wished----"

"At what a cost!" She hid her face in her hands a moment. "It is horrible to

see a soul stripped bare! Poor Zoya!"

He was silent a moment, thinking deeply.

"We must do what is best for the greatest number. If you and I are taken with the money, your work in Germany is finished forever. Don't you see? Our power--our influence, are gone. We must get this money out--some way. If Hochwald has escaped he is probably already on his way to Switzerland. The *dossier*--the papers you have----"

"I had forgotten----"

"They must go, too----"

She thought a moment and then raised her head joyously and laid her hand in his.

"Whatever you say, *mon Philippe*," she said bravely.

He took her in his arms and kissed her, but she drew away from him quietly.

"The plan----?" she questioned.

He frowned and smiled in the same moment.

"It requires another--Herr Markov--but it is a brave plan," he laughed, "a wonderful plan. You shall see."

"Why can't you tell----?"

"Because without Herr Markov it fails. He may refuse----"

"I don't understand--"

"A woman's curiosity!" he laughed. "Trust me. And wait."

At this moment there was a quiet knock upon the door and Frau Nisko entered with Tanya's dry clothing. Rowland was introduced and seized the woman warmly by the hand. But when he tried to thank her she demurred.

"I was born free, Herr Rowland. I would rather die than believe I shall not be free again."

"But we can't endanger you longer--tonight we must go----"

"They suspect nothing yet. But Matthias Markov is no fool. He will think of something. You do not know Herr Markov----!" she finished quietly.

"We know only that he is risking his safety and yours for strangers--"

"It is not the first time. He sets no value on his life." She shrugged. "Nor I on mine. It's a pilgrimage--soon over. His life has not been a happy one--a man of wealth, of family, position--reduced through misfortune, suffering and ill health to take to the roads with a music-box. Herr Gott! And yet he pays his way--always the same, with the courage of a man and the heart of a child. Patience, forgiveness, gentleness. That is Matthias Markov."

"But why has he chosen this strange vocation?" asked Rowland.

Frau Nisko shrugged her plump shoulders again.

"He says it is because of his health, because he cannot stay indoors. But I know----"

She paused while with intense interest they waited for her to go on.

"It is not my secret, but you are his friends. His wife deserted him--ran away with another--a beautiful woman--faithless. He searches for her from one end of Europe to the other----"

Rowland and Tanya exchanged a quick glance of comprehension. Rowland stepped forward and laid a hand on Frau Nisko's arm.

"His search is ended, Frau Nisko," he said gently. And then, with a gesture toward the door of Matthias Markov, "He has found her. She is there!"

The woman gazed at him uncomprehendingly.

"Frau Markov!" she whispered.

"Madame Rochal----"

"You are sure----?"

"We left them there--alone."

Frau Nisko peered out at the eloquent panels of the closed door and they heard the deep rumble of Herr Markov's voice and Zoya's in a low tone answering him. There could be no doubt about it. Herr Markov's pilgrimage was ended. And Zoya's----? Rowland's lips set in a thin line and his glance and Tanya's met in silent communion.

In a moment there was a commotion below and a lodger came up the stairs in some excitement. Frau Nisko went out to meet him. There was a soldier at the door who wished to ask Frau Nisko a few more questions.

"Very well," she said coolly. "Tell him that I will come down at once," and the lodger departed.

She signaled them to follow and silently they reëntered the room of Herr Markov. He was sitting beside Zoya's bed, her hand in both of his, and started to his feet as they entered.

"Soldiers again, Herr Markov. They may mean to search the house. Herr Rowland and the Fräulein must go in your closet. There is a narrow opening under the eaves at the further end where two boards have been displaced. Enter, and I will hang some clothing before it. We must take the chance. We will leave the door open."

Rowland and Tanya obeyed quickly, taking the black bag; Frau Nisko, thrusting Tanya's clothing after them and hiding all traces of their presence. This was the test that Rowland had been expecting and Frau Nisko had met it with a calmness that argued for success. So Rowland and Tanya crawled through the aperture and crouched upon the naked beams of the house in the darkness, listening for the footsteps of the searchers.

"What shall you do if they find us?" whispered Tanya, her hand in Rowland's.

"Nothing," he said. "The game is up. I could shoot one man--two perhaps--"

-but not the entire Landwehr. We won't think of that, though. It's devilish black in here--but fearfully cozy."

He drew her into his arms and silently they listened to the tramp of heavy boots upon the stair and the sound of gruff voices.

"A woman ill, you say?"

"Very ill, of lung trouble, and in high fever. My wife, Herr Lieutenant. I hope you will not find it necessary to disturb her for long." This in Markov's voice, somewhat tremulous in the depth of its appeal.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Markov. I was refused for service on account of permanent illness. My papers are here."

"*Gut!*"

A silence in which the officer examined them. Then the steps of the officer to and fro in the room.

"This trunk----"

"Contains merely some books--Herr Lieutenant."

"The closet----?"

The officer's steps sounded again nearer them.

"Merely some old clothes, Herr Lieutenant," said Markov's voice. "Will you enter?"

A terrible moment of suspense. But at last the footsteps turned and moved away.

"And this other room here?" asked the voice. And Frau Nisko replied coolly, "My daughter's. She works in the Kraus Locomotivfabrik."

"*Ach, so!*"

"And these other rooms?"

"No one. Search, Herr Lieutenant."

And presently they heard the heavy steps go thumping down the stairs. Rowland drew a long breath. It seemed that he had been holding it for hours.

This visit was a warning to them all. Rowland and Tanya crawled out of their hole in the wall, somewhat pallid, and covered with dust, but determined that an effort of some sort to escape must be made at once. Herr Markov agreed with them and a council was held. Rowland, who had been doing some serious thinking, at once startled them by revealing what was in his mind.

"If Herr Markov will sell his donkey and piano-organ," he said, "I will give him ten thousand marks for them."

Zoya Rochal turned on her pillow and looked at him curiously, while Frau Nisko threw up her hands and repeated the fabulous sum.

But Herr Markov had straightened.

"So you had thought of that, too, Herr Rowland?"

"There is nothing else," shrugged Rowland helplessly. "Whatever happens I must get this money through to Switzerland--and in the machine there is perhaps room----"

"Yes, yes--there is room," said Markov thoughtfully. "We could make room. My poor instrument of torture! And Fra Umberto!"

"You do not wish to part with them?"

"It is not that. But I would not sell them, Herr Rowland. What I give, I give,--in the fullness of my heart."

"I can't ask more of you. Perhaps it will be but a loan----"

"Wait----," said Markov, his hand to his brow. "I am thinking." They watched in a moment of silence, when Herr Markov rose and took a pace or two toward the window.

"Yes. Yes. It could be done. It shall be done. My poor machine! We shall disembowel it--take out all its poor noisy entrails. It can be done in a short while. And the Fräulein shall sit inside, and travel in state to the Swiss border."

"A stroke of genius," cried Rowland excitedly. "I hadn't thought of that. And the money----?"

"A soft cushion of bank notes to sit upon."

"Ten thousand marks--a hundred thousand if you will but do it."

Matthais Markov looked at him reproachfully.

"Herr Rowland does not understand," he said gently. "It is not my poverty--but my heart--that consents."

Rowland bowed his head and caught Markov by the hand.

"Forgive me, my friend," he muttered.

Markov waved his apologies aside.

"It shall be done. The Fräulein shall go and----"

Zoya gave a hard little laugh.

"And what becomes of me?" she asked.

Markov rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The question it seemed for the moment had stricken him dumb.

"It will be some days, Zoya," said Rowland quickly, "before you can be moved----"

"In the meanwhile you will leave me here at the mercy of Baron von Stromberg?" she asked querulously.

Frau Nisko looked pained but spoke up bravely: "They have done what they could--you were not recognized----"

"But if *he* should come----" she shuddered.

"The chances are one in a hundred----"

"But that one chance----! It is the one he never neglects."

Another silence in which Zoya relaxed again upon her pillow, groaning.

Markov crossed to the side of the bed and bent over her.

"What is it that you wish--Maria----" he paused in a significant confusion, and then finished painfully, calling her by the name they knew--"What can we do--Madame Rochal?"

She straightened again and sat up in bed, her eyes flashing feverishly.

"Who is to stay here with me?" she asked. "Am I to be deserted, flaunted, cast aside into the gutter for my enemy to step upon? Am I no longer of any value--any account in your reckonings?" She laughed hysterically. "Go!" she whispered. "Go! I don't care."

"Sh--! Mariana! Sh--! Madame," whispered Markov soothingly. "There is no danger. No one can harm you. Did you not vote as Von Stromberg wished? He can have nothing against you. What can he do? In less than a week I will return----"

"You!" muttered Frau Nisko.

Zoya slowly raised herself on one elbow while Tanya looked at Rowland incomprehendingly, the nature of the sacrifice Markov was making slowly dawning on her.

"Who else?" said Markov quietly. "It would be suicide for Herr Rowland. I have my papers. It is simplicity itself. In four days I shall be at Lindenhof. It is a mile from Lindau, on the Bodensee--Lake Constance. The Fräulein and the money shall cross into Switzerland from there at night in a boat. It is a village I know well. It can be arranged. Then I shall return by train to Munich."

Tanya had said nothing and her lips were tightly compressed with a meaning that Rowland had learned to understand.

"And you, Philippe?" she asked quietly.

"What I have done once before," he murmured soberly, "shall be accomplished again."

His look silenced the protest that was rising to her lips. She only clasped her hands nervously a moment, but said nothing.

"And you will stay here--*mon ami*, for a few days--until I am better," questioned Zoya eagerly.

"There's nothing else," he said with a shrug.

Pain clutched at the hearts of at least three persons in that room, but Matthias Markov suffered the most. Rowland could see it in the lines of his eyes, which had suddenly made him seem quite old again. The years that had parted Markov and the woman who bore his name had only served to widen the breach between them--a breach that all the love and tenderness in the world from such a man as he could never hope to fill. Even on her bed of pain Zoya remained the *mondaine* while Matthias Markov, to her at least, was only the hurdy-gurdy man. She had repudiated him, had forbidden him to use her name. It was piteous. But

Herr Markov shrugged his lean shoulders and managed a smile for Rowland and Tanya, in which they both read a new meaning of abnegation and sacrifice.

Zoya had sunk back upon her pillow, so Herr Markov gave her another opiate and presently she slept. Then while Frau Nisko went down stairs to reassure herself that all was well below, Rowland and Tanya listened to Markov's itinerary between Munich and Lindau. Fra Umberto could travel thirty miles a day if he had to. It was nothing--if the Fräulein would not get tired within the instrument of torture--Landsberg tomorrow night, Memmingen the night after, then Weingarten and Lindenhof--four days at the most. He, Markov, had been over the road often and knew it well. At Lindenhof he had a great friend, a fisherman and a vine-grower named Gratz who lived with his poverty like a prince in the ruined schloss of Kempelstein. There they would go. And there take boat from the very walls of the *schloss* to Switzerland and freedom.

In the meanwhile they must decide upon a simple code of numerals and letters for the telegraph, to be sent to Weingarten in case of important information or warning. When that was arranged, Markov went down stairs to find a screw driver, wrench and hammer to "disembowel" the dear "machine of torture."

They followed him out of the room with their glances and then with one accord gazed at the sleeping woman. She lay breathing deeply, one graceful arm under her head and her lips were smiling. Tanya's mood toward her had changed.

"You saw?" she asked in a whisper. "She repudiated him. She is not worth waiting for." And then impulsively she threw her arms around Rowland's neck, whispering tensely, "Come, Philippe--tonight, with me. He should stay here--it is his place----"

Rowland kissed her gently.

"It would not be safe, dear. You must get through to Switzerland--with the money. Don't make things too hard for me----"

"Ah, Philippe," she whispered. "I am nothing without you. His papers--a disguise----"

But Rowland shook his head.

"It is dangerous. We should both be lost and that which I came to save. In this way you at least shall get through surely----"

"But you? We have found life together--I am frightened for you."

"Don't worry. I'll pull through--some way."

"Come, Philippe," she whispered again. "Life or death--together!"

He held her close in his arms, aware that the moment of her weakness should be his for strength, and soothed her gently.

"This way means life for both of us--success. I am not afraid. I will follow soon. Would you have me less noble than he?" he asked.

She was silent and after a while she raised her head and he saw that the

moment of her uncertainty had passed.

"I will go," she murmured, and he kissed away the moisture that had gathered at her eyes before it fell.

"Princess Tatyana!" he laughed, "if you will only wave your wand--no evil can come to me."

* * * * *

And so it was that that evening, just after dark, a very tall man and a very small donkey hauling a hurdy-gurdy, passed southward along the Sommer Strasse and were soon lost in the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VISITOR

For three days the President of the Order of Nemi had sat in the room upon the third floor of Number 16 Schwaiger Strasse, keeping the convalescent Zoya company, sleeping at night on a pallet of straw in the dark hole under the eaves. Frau Nisko brought food and water and dressed Zoya's wound, which was of a much less serious character than had been supposed. Rowland had at last prevailed upon Frau Nisko to accept five hundred marks from the roll that he had abstracted from a package of the bank notes--legitimate traveling expenses on this extraordinary commission. Nothing had disturbed the quiet of his imprisonment but the itching desire to be on his way, and the impatience of his difficult companion, who with her improvement showed growing symptoms of a gayety which Rowland could not share. Frau Nisko had reported that all was quiet in the neighborhood, the guard of soldiers having been withdrawn, and from his view from the dormer window, the peaceful streets were tempting. Rowland longed to go down the stairs and carelessly saunter forth under the very eyes of the police. That was the sort of an escape that appealed to him--something simple, something obvious and then--to the woods and fields by night--they'd never catch him there. He knew that game.

But Zoya Rochal bothered him. With convalescence had come a desire for cigarettes and companionship. She was now quite reconciled to her situation and except for the fear of Von Stromberg which she continually expressed, seemed to

be suffering no great hardship. It was perhaps unfortunate that Rowland thought of Tanya and Matthias Markov, followed them in his mind's eye in their long pilgrimage to the Boden See, for Zoya Rochal was clever and with returning spirits discovered the restraint in his manner which was so different from that to which she had been accustomed.

"*Mon pauvre Philippe*," she said at last, with a smile at the lighted candle, "you are never quite contented unless you are shooting somebody. Come, let us be happy. I am getting very strong. See, I move my arm easily. Tomorrow, tonight even, I should be able to go away with you."

"Tomorrow! But you were to wait for Matthias Markov!" he said in surprise.

"Pouf! It is precisely because of Herr Markov that I do not propose to wait. Herr Markov is--well--a friend of my girlhood---- But one outgrows one's early associations, *n'est-ce pas*? He is very kind, but oh! so tiresome." She gave an expressive shrug and frowned. "I do not like to look back. I might be turned into a pillar of salt. The future is difficult enough without thinking of the mistakes of one's past."

She cared for nothing, thought of nothing--but herself. But whatever his own opinion, Rowland had no curiosity, no wish to encourage confidences that might be painful. He knew what she was....

"Escape?" he questioned. "That is easily said. But how?"

"That we shall walk forth, arm in arm, *mon ami*, take a train like a newly wedded couple and be off----"

"And be arrested at the Bahnhof----?"

"The chance is worth taking----"

"You have passports--you might get through----"

"And you--where is your resourcefulness? Are you not the President of Nemi? Give Frau Nisko your coin to take to Herr Yaeger. He is not unlike you in appearance. His papers would serve----"

But Rowland shook his head.

"Impossible. My faith in your associates has failed. When Markov returns he will help you to freedom and I----"

"You would desert me, *mon brave*?" she said softly, one hand upon his arm. "Can it be true that after all my admiration for you, my aid in your cause, my faith, my devotion, you will turn against me? Don't say that, *mon Philippe*. You do not know the depths of the heart of a woman of my kind. You are a man of experience. You know what a woman who has come from nothing must suffer to rise in the world."

"Oh, I say, Zoya," he broke in with a smile, "I haven't reproached you----"

"Perhaps I should be more happy if you did. For then I would know that you cared. But you say nothing--say nothing and only smoke and smile." She broke

off with a bitter little laugh. "You do not flatter me, *mon vieux*."

"Is this a time for flattery, Zoya? Over a hundred miles of hostile country to be passed----"

"We will not pass them more quickly by losing confidence in each other----"

He caught her hand and pressed it to his lips. "Have I not remained----?" he asked.

She made a grimace at the hand that he had released.

"Such a cold little kiss!" she smiled. "What has come over you, *mon Philippe*? A few days ago you were so different. I had begun to hope that you cared as--as I do. Have I grown ugly because of my wound? Or was your devotion only a means to an end--the rescue of Fräulein Korasov?"

"Zoya, what's the use. You know----"

"I am no fool, *mon vieux*," she went on coolly. "I have a seventh sense. Fräulein Korasov--she is very pretty. You are her D'Artagnan. You play the hero in the piece. You rescue her--she adores you----"

She waved a hand in protest as he began to speak.

"Oh, I have eyes in my head. And you, *mon Philippe*, you are filled with pity--beauty in distress--you care for her a little, perhaps, and you forget your great pact of loyalty and friendship with Zoya Rochal----"

"It is not true----"

"You send her away with Matthias Markov and the money of Nemi. What do you know of the honesty of Matthias Markov or of her? And you keep me here to be taken by General Graf von Stromberg and to be shot perhaps against a wall."

"There was nothing else to do. You were in no condition----"

"Ah, yes, but you might at least have given me the privilege of your confidences."

"I did what I thought was best," he said shortly. "Do I not share your danger?" She shrugged.

"With regret, with impatience, but without tenderness, *mon brave*. Do you suppose that I cannot see? I am merely an impediment. I hold you back while you long to be off yonder--to escape and leave me here----"

"Zoya----"

She laughed and rose.

"Beware of the fury of the woman scorned, *mon vieux*. Tell me that you love me, tell me that you hate--but indifference--that, at least, I will not bear!"

There was nothing for it but to mollify her. He put his arm around her and kissed her.

"Hang it all, Zoya! You ought to know me by this time," he muttered. "Desperation and sentiment won't mix. I'm not going to be caught here if I can help it----"

She relaxed a little in his arms.

"Philippe," she murmured, "you know the worst of me. Don't judge me with those terrible accusing eyes of yours. I want to begin--again. Give me my chance to forget. I love you, *mon Philippe*, since the first----"

She paused, startled, for Rowland had released her suddenly, a warning finger at his lips. And then they heard clearly again a thin voice in the hallway below, a man's voice that they both knew--and the sound of footsteps upon the stairs.

The color had all gone from Zoya's cheeks and she stared helplessly at Rowland.

"Von Stromberg!" he whispered.

He snatched up his cap and vanished out of the window into the darkness upon the roof. Hurriedly he crawled up astride the peak of the dormer window where he lay forward listening.

A loud knock upon the door.

"Where is this sick lady?" said the voice. "I would like to see her----" A pause, and then, "Ah! And so it is you after all, Madame Rochal! This is most extraordinary--most extra-or-din-ary!" He caressed the words as if they were something good to the taste. "You have nothing to say. You are very pale. I have frightened you? I am sorry. *Bitte*, lie down again upon the bed from which you have arisen and be quite composed. I will not harm you. Why should I? Did you not vote for my wonderful resolution? *Ach so!*"

The tones of the voice were eloquent--cynical and soft by turns, and Rowland did not need to see the cadaverous, leering face, the air of sardonic condescension, the deep baleful eyes which glared and charmed by their very malignity.

"Ach, you are feeling better, *nicht wahr?* A swallow of water. So. We will now have a quiet amicable chat. Will you not ask me to sit down? Will you not ask after my wound? I have no wound," he laughed dryly. "Herr Rowland is a bad shot. *Danke*. But if there is one thing in the world that irks me, it is the climbing of stairs.... Now we will begin. Will you now have the kindness to tell me how you managed to come here...?"

A low murmur scarcely distinguishable in reply.

"Over the roofs? Wounded? There is some negligence here. My men searched." And then more quietly, "You were always resourceful--most resourceful, Madame. Wounded too. That is a pity. I trust not seriously.... That is good. It would be a pity.... Your beautiful neck, in a ball dress. But it is not possible that you could have accomplished this escape alone.... In the storm! ... a desperate venture...."

Rowland heard her murmur again.

"Ach. It is unbelievable. Alone--you, Madame ... so frail--and wounded,

too."

"I was hurt and frightened, Excellency," Rowland heard her say as her voice gathered strength. "But it was not difficult."

"Very easy. So. It is a pity I am such a credulous old man, *nicht wahr?* I am growing old. I am losing my cunning. What a pity!"

"I tell you the truth, Excellency."

"You surprise me. But I am suspicious. It is my trade--to believe in the universality of the lie, which is the basis of all successful intrigue. You will pardon me, Madame, but I do not believe you." And then in a quick concentrated tone, menacing--vicious, "Who helped you across those roofs, Madame? Herr Rowland, *nicht wahr?*"

"No."

"Herr Rowland----!"

"I did not see him."

"You lie! Answer me."

"Excellency! You are hurting my arm."

"Answer me."

A long silence, then a murmur of pain.

"You shall----"

It was with an effort that Rowland controlled his will to descend ... but he clutched at the tiles and did not move.

"*Ach, so----*" came the triumphant voice. "It was he----"

"But he has escaped--gone yesterday. I swear it!"

"So--and the black bag? It was here? Answer me!"

"Yes, it was here."

"And Fräulein Korasov----?"

"She, too."

"A nice party--and they have all escaped? Some one shall suffer for this."

Rowland could hear him stamping to and fro, heard his voice at the window, while he peered out and Rowland had even prepared to risk discovery by crawling up to the shelter of the chimneys above, when Von Stromberg turned back into the room again. Rowland heard him call to the man in the corridor who had accompanied him and between them find the loose boarding into the loft. And after a while the malicious voice again.

"So it was there he slept? While these pigs of officers played tag upon the roof tops." And then to the soldier, "Go. Wait below!"

Just above his head, Rowland grinned to himself and breathed more freely. Luck! Sheer luck!

There was silence in the room for a long moment.

"So! Escape--and you have helped to accomplish it. Accessory to treason,

Madame. You know the penalty of that."

"Excellency, I had nothing to do with it. I was under the influence of morphine. I slept."

"You do not then know how it was accomplished?"

"No, Excellency----"

A silence and then the quiet tones that were so dangerous.

"It will not pay you to be stubborn, Madame. It is my habit always to find out what I want to know----"

"But if I am ignorant----?" she appealed.

"Who is this Herr Markov who occupies this room? Markov! A name not unfamiliar. Markov!"

She was silent.

"Who is he? Speak!"

"He is--my husband, Excellency."

Rowland heard the thin raucous laugh.

"You lose a lover only to find a husband! A real husband? The long arm of coincidence? Or another lie?"

"The truth----" in a lowered voice. "I had not seen him for years."

"Well, and if--I believe you? Herr Markov helped our birds to escape?"

"We came. What could he do? Give me up to the police after all these years----?"

"But--the others--the black bag----"

A silence, and then----

"Have I not told you, Excellency, that I was sick--sleeping----?"

"You have told me many things. I shall believe what I choose. How much of this did Frau Nisko know?"

"Nothing--except that I had come to him. She did not know how. She believed that I came up the stairs. We all shared the food of two. The others went out into the streets at night and escaped----"

"With the black bag? Impossible. There is not a black suit-case in Germany that we do not know about."

He broke off suddenly and a change came into his voice.

"Come, Madame. You and I have worked together before and you have not found me ungenerous. I will make a bargain with you. Help me to find the black bag and I will give you--say--two hundred thousand marks. Ah, you are tempted? The woman who is tempted falls."

"I know nothing," she murmured.

"Perhaps three hundred thousand will sharpen your intelligence."

He laughed and chose another method.

"How was the money taken from this room?"

"I do not know. At night while I slept."

"Who took it?"

A long silence. And then another change of tone.

"You are young, Madame, and still beautiful. It would be a pity----"

She understood what he meant.

"Excellency!" Her tone was raised now in fear, in horror. "What, Excellency?"

"Death! Tomorrow!" The words fell from his lips sharply. "Will you speak or will you not? On the one hand--what I have promised--on the other--a military trial--a matter of minutes, and then--a stone wall--a volley--and a tumbled heap of soiled clothing upon the ground. Zoya Rochal--the most beautiful woman in Europe. I paint a true portrait. I have seen----"

"Excellency----!"

"You will speak?"

Her voice had sunk to a murmur and Rowland could not distinctly hear but he felt suddenly very ill. She was telling. Zoya was betraying Tanya and Matthias Markov. A sudden fury possessed him. He gripped the tiles in a struggle to control the impulse to murder that was in his heart. But the fever passed. Tanya! He must get word to Markov--a hurdy-gurdy--a donkey--their trail from Munich was wide and long and the expedient that had seemed so certain of success was now doomed to sudden disaster unless he could reach Markov before von Stromberg's men were put upon the track.

Did Zoya know which way the pair had gone? He tried to think. Only Markov and he knew the itinerary--he listened intently.

"I do not know, Excellency," said Zoya in a suppressed voice. "I do not know more. To Switzerland, by the nearest route. A piano-organ, a donkey. You promise?"

"Herr Markov and the Fräulein shall meet with no harm. I give you my word, as Councilor of the Empire. He shall go free. For your sake I will merely send him to Austria and you----" He broke off with a laugh, "You, Madame, shall have the rest of Europe to yourself."

"Thanks, Excellency," she murmured. "And I am free?"

"As the air. Once a day you will report at the Police Headquarters of Munich until further notice."

Rowland heard his footsteps and the sound of the door latch.

"My compliments, Madame Rochal, upon your discretion. I hope that your beautiful neck may not be scarred. I will indeed see that a doctor is sent to you at once. In the meanwhile--*au revoir*."

The door closed with a bang and Rowland heard the heavy footsteps going down the bare stairs. And in a little while from a perch in the shadow of

the dormer window he marked the tall figure with his soldier attendant enter an automobile and drive swiftly away.

Rowland waited a moment, desperate--uncertain--sure only that he must find some means of getting a message over the wire to the luckless Markov and Tanya at Weingarten, where they would have arrived tonight, but in a grim apprehension as to his ability to reach a telegraph office. But there was no time to delay. The moments were precious. In half an hour--perhaps less--Von Stromberg would have instructions wired to his agents in every town between Munich and the Swiss frontier. And so, reckless of his silhouette as he crawled in at the window, he again entered the room. Zoya was standing, facing him, pale, expectant, terrified at the look she saw in his eyes. She caught at his arm but as he strode to the door she seized him again and held him fiercely.

"Where are you going----?"

"Away from here--from the sight of you----"

"You heard----?"

"Yes. You've betrayed us--for money----"

"That is not true, Philippe," she whispered wildly, as she fought to keep his hand from the door knob. "You did not hear what passed----"

"I heard enough----"

"I lied to him,--told him that you had gone. He believes it----"

"But the others. You told----"

"It was merely to gain time. They are far away. We can reach them. It was you that I was thinking of--you--all the time. You--out there on the roof. All that I wanted was for him to go away so that you would not be discovered. I did it to save you----"

"To save me--you!"

"I threw him off his guard. He believes that you are gone. You shall escape now,--I too--we will escape to freedom--in a few days it will be arranged. Herr Markov and the Fräulein will come to no harm even if they are found. He promised. You heard?"

"I've heard enough. Let me go."

He shook himself free of her but she seized him again.

"No--you shall not go. I did what I could to save you. I told him as little ... merely that they had gone upon the road ... that was all. His eyes were burning into my brain, Philippe. He compelled me. He may not find them. And even if he does, he will not harm them. It is only the money of Nemi that he wants. That will satisfy him. Let the money go. What does it matter now? I do not want the money--I only want--you, Philippe. In a few days I will get you passports and we will leave together. Not tonight, Philippe--wait. I will explain----"

"Out of my way----"

He had pulled the door open and thrust her aside. She stumbled and fell to her knees, still clinging to him.

"I will not--let you go. You will be killed. Just a moment. Listen to me, Philippe. I swear to you that you have misunderstood. I did not---- Oh God!"

[image]

"Listen to me, Philippe! I swear to you that you have misunderstood."

He drew away and she fell prone upon the floor, trying to follow him. His fury had turned to contempt and now to pity. He turned, picked her up in his arms and carried her to the bed, releasing himself gently, for she had no more strength to fight him. And then he left her and went slowly down the stairs.

For a while she lay there motionless, her head buried in her arms. Once her shoulders moved convulsively but she made no sound. Her face when she raised it toward the candle light was haggard, but tearless. Her lips were compressed and she even smiled a little. But her eyes were unusually bright. With an abrupt movement of decision she straightened, and getting up went to the door, where she paused a moment, gazing down the stairs. Then went to the landing below, clinging to the railing, and called Frau Nisko. There was no reply. She crept down to the lower floor and out to the kitchen. There was a woman there by the window fanning herself with a newspaper.

"Where is Frau Nisko?" asked Zoya.

The woman turned a heavy bovine gaze.

"She has gone," she replied.

"Where?"

The woman shrugged.

"Did a man come in here a while ago?"

"A man--yes."

"They talked?"

"Yes--yonder," pointing to the door of the dining room.

"Did they stay there long?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"I do not know. He went out yonder," pointing to a rear door.

"There is a gate at the rear?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did you hear what they said?"

The woman laughed mirthlessly.

"What business is it of mine?"

"Where has Frau Nisko gone?"

"Have I not said that I did not know?"

She had merely the politeness of cooks and now turned her back resolutely, faced the window and fanned herself again with a view to ending the discussion.

There was nothing for it but to await Frau Nisko's return and so, leaving word that she wished to see the landlady when she returned, slowly Zoya climbed the stairs again and went into her room, where she sat on the bed in deep thought. After awhile she got up and lighting the lamp, searched for her clothing in the drawers of the dressing stand. She took the garments out one by one, examining them and preening them with her fingers. Then, discarding the old wrapper that she wore, she dressed with some care and attention to detail, and then lay down upon the bed and waited.

But when Frau Nisko knocked some moments later, she straightened and questioned rapidly.

"Herr Rowland has gone?"

The woman was somewhat shaken by the events of the evening and more than surprised at Madame Rochal's appearance.

"Yes, God be thanked! He went safely from my house. It has been almost too much. But the Herr General said nothing when he went out. I can't understand--"

"I explained matters to his satisfaction. He will not bother you----"

"You are very kind--but it mystifies me greatly. You are in terror of your life in one moment and then suddenly--all is well. And now you go somewhere----?"

"Frau Nisko," said Zoya, ignoring the question, "you were sent out with a message to the telegraph, *nicht wahr?*"

"It was at Herr Rowland's orders----"

"What was the message?"

"I didn't understand. It was written in a code."

"He wrote it--here?"

"Down stairs in the dining room. It was dangerous to be there. I told him so. But he did not care."

"What did the message say?"

"It was about the price of some second-hand furniture to be shipped to Weingarten."

"Yes, yes. Where was it sent?"

"To Weingarten----"

"But to whom?"

"To a Herr Liedenthal at the Zweisler Waldhaus----"

"Ah. You are sure of the names?"

"Positive."

"And Herr Rowland, did he tell you where he was going?"

Frau Nisko's amazement had been increasing.

"Did he not tell *you*, Madame?"

"No. He--he was frightened at the Herr General and has left me. Where did he go?"

"Into danger, I'm afraid. He seemed reckless. He asked if I knew the time of the night-trains for Lindau----"

"Lindau--and you told him?"

"I found out from a lodger upon the second floor who is in the Railway Service. There is but one train. It leaves the Haupt Bahnhof at thirteen minutes past eleven."

Madame Rochal hesitated a moment, and then:

"Frau Nisko," she said, quickly, glancing at her watch, "I have been given my freedom. I am going out. I do not know when I shall return----"

"But Herr Markov----!"

"I will communicate with him."

She glanced around the room and then went quickly down the stair, Frau Nisko following, still bewildered at the turn of events.

"What shall I say to Herr Markov?" she repeated helplessly.

"That I--I am going to seek him," said Zoya.

"And if the Herr General should send?"

"You need not worry. That has been arranged. He believes that you knew nothing of the others. Good by," she finished at the street door. "You shall be rewarded----"

"*Im Himmel!*" muttered Frau Nisko cynically, as she watched the slim figure of Zoya Rochal go swiftly down the street toward the bridge. "And Matthias Markov--he also."

Then she slowly turned and reëntered the house.

CHAPTER XXII

PILGRIMS

It was with trembling limbs and a heavy heart that Tanya had followed Herr Markov carrying the black bag down the stairs of the house in the Schwaiger

Strasse, through the rear door to the small street and the stable which sheltered Fra Umberto and the "instrument of torture"--alas! now the instrument of torture no longer, for all its insides had been removed during the early afternoon and hidden in a box under a pile of hay. Herr Markov had sighed as he gazed at the empty case, but there was no time to be lost and after having assured themselves that they had escaped observation, Tanya had unpacked the black valise, transferring its contents to the body of the machine and concealing the luckless bag in a dusty crib under a pile of lumber. Then as they wished to be well beyond the city before sun-down, Markov had hitched Fra Umberto, Tanya had clambered in, sitting on the pile of bank notes and they had silently driven away.

The escape had seemed simplicity itself, and with the passage of the last post of soldiers at the edge of the city Tanya had gathered hope that their perilous venture would be successful. She had tried not to think of Philippe Rowland. She had hoped when their plan was first spoken of, that Rowland was to impersonate Herr Markov, and using his papers make the desperate effort to get through to Switzerland alone with her. But Herr Markov had willed otherwise (and wisely perhaps) and Philippe had been left there--alone with Zoya--sharing a terrible danger, but yet terrible as the danger was, Tanya could not help thinking that she would much have preferred anyone else to have shared it with Philippe than Zoya Rochal.

During the first night of their pilgrimage Tanya had been very miserable. The confined space had cramped her muscles and the jolting of the vehicle seemed to be jarring every nerve in her body, but Herr Markov had evidently deemed it of the utmost importance to cover as many miles away from Munich in the early hours of the evening and night as was possible for man and beast. Occasionally, when the way was clear, he had conversed with her cheerfully, bidding her keep up her courage and asking after her comfort; and to all of his questions she had answered bravely, changing her position as she could and patiently awaiting the hour of her deliverance. And it had come at last toward midnight when Herr Markov had halted the donkey and invited Tanya to get out of her box. The invitation, welcome though it was, had not been easy of acceptance, and it was only with the help of Herr Markov's long arms that she had been able to climb over the sides of her prison and descend.

She had found herself in a dim country lane which led to a small farm-house. With an encouraging show of confidence Herr Markov had led Fra Umberto toward this building and after some difficulty had succeeded in arousing the occupants, an old man and woman, who had stuck their heads out of the windows in some alarm until they learned the identity of the pilgrims and saw Fra Umberto and the hurdy-gurdy, when they had come down and made the visitors welcome. This house, it appeared, was one of the stopping places of the hurdy-gurdy man,

the old farmer and his wife, his good friends, for whom in better times he played his whole repertoire in payment of board and lodging. Tanya's presence Herr Markov had glibly explained--his niece, bound to Leutkirch, to visit a sister who was about to be married, and so Tanya had found a bed of which she was in real need and had slept the sleep of utter weariness.

But Herr Markov had called her at daylight and they were now again upon their way. Fra Umberto's legs were short but they moved rapidly and in the by-roads and in thinly settled places the thoughtful Markov invited Tanya to descend which she did gratefully, glad of the chance to loosen the kinks in her cramped muscles. And when she got down, the donkey, relieved of her weight in the vehicle, frisked along at a rate which showed her that they had lost no time.

They went through Landberg, passed the night in another farm-house on the Igling road and by the following afternoon had reached Memmingen.

It was beyond Memmingen upon the road to Weingarten that Tanya, waiting for the darkness to fall so that she could escape from her hiding place, heard Herr Markov exchanging greetings with a traveler afoot. This was not unusual, for Herr Markov, as she had already discovered, carried his politeness all about the world with him, but Tanya, who had been sitting long in her cramped position, had been hoping to be able to get out and walk beside her fellow pilgrim, for whom she had developed the deepest sympathy and appreciation. But this person to whom he had spoken, it seemed, was bound in the same direction as themselves and all immediate chance of escape from her prison was out of the question. She heard the deep boom of Herr Markov's voice and a reply, quiet and muffled as though at a distance.

"A fine evening--yes"--said Markov. "A rare evening indeed which makes one bless God for a life in the open under the stars. You are bound for Weingarten, Father, or beyond?"

"Beyond," replied the quiet voice.

"Ah, yes--to the monastery at Rothenbach, perhaps? No? You will forgive my impertinent curiosity, but the road is my life and those who walk it are my friends and companions. We are sociable people, Father, Fra Umberto and I, and since one of us is denied the privilege of speech, the other of us must needs make up for the deficiency. You will forgive my wagging tongue?"

"It is my mission in life to grant forgiveness," said the other voice solemnly. "It is my trade, Herr Musician."

Tanya understood now--a priest, a holy man, a vagrant monk.

"Then we are much of the same mind," continued Markov, "for I, too, have forgiven much--my trade too," with a deep laugh, "but there is little profit in it."

"Not to the body, but to the soul--it is that alone which is immortal."

The voice came more clearly now and something in its cadences caused

Tanya to listen more intently. It was curiously like one that she had once known; but where--when---?

"Aye, immortal----" went on Markov contemplatively, "but to a hurdy-gurdy man the seat of soul is in the stomach. For without food the stomach sickens and thus, the soul. What becomes of your immortality then, holy Father?"

She heard the priest laugh to himself--that laugh!

"Your philosophy and your theology are from the same piece of goods, my son. If it keeps you warm you are wise to wear it." And then in a change of tone, "You came along the Landberg road?"

"Yes, Father."

"You see many people. Has there been much talk about the rising of the Socialist elements in Munich?"

"You've heard----?" There was a pause, and then:

"Merely that a meeting was broken up--that there was shooting, a fire, people were killed and some of them--my friends--wounded. And you, Father--what have you been told?"

"The facts have been suppressed. The newspapers say nothing. You were not questioned by the police when you left Munich?"

"Oh, no. I merely showed my papers. I am well known in these parts. I--I had nothing to do with the disturbance, though my heart is with those who have rebelled--for I, too, am a Revolutionary."

"And since you left Munich--you have not been questioned?"

"No." And then, "You have heard that the police are after those who escaped?"

"Yes," muttered the voice.

No more for the present. And yet to Tanya what she had heard was enough, for the identity of the voice of the man she could not see had slowly come to her and now with a sickening and terrible certitude she knew that Markov's companion of the road was Gregory Hochwald.

The hurdy-gurdy was now an "instrument of torture" indeed, for in it Tanya sat a prisoner, helpless, while along side her, all unconscious of the secret Markov guarded, walked the one man most disposed to take profit from her misfortunes. And with a sense of an impending disaster she heard Markov talk glibly on, every moment, apparently, gaining more confidence in the integrity of his companion. And yet how was she to warn Markov? The least sound, the least motion would betray her presence and reveal the reasons for their flight. She had a morbid desire to peer out and see--to verify the unpleasant testimony of her ears--but there was no way unless she raised the lid of the machine and that, of course, meant discovery. And so she was forced to sit silent and listen to Markov, who with every moment came nearer to dangerous revelations.

"The end must soon come," the false priest was saying. "The world is weary of blood-letting. Germany is beyond reach---beyond help of the Church. I have done what I could, but I am going beyond its borders to Switzerland--to escape its persecutions. I have had enough."

"And I," said Markov; "it is there that I go too with--with my good Fra Umberto."

"The weather threatens again. Where shall you sleep tonight, my son?"

"At the farm-house of some good friends of mine, a mile or so from here. We have had a long day."

"Good friends of yours? Would they mind if I came with you? I have a purse well filled----"

Tanya was aware of Herr Markov's hesitation and the long moment of silence that followed gave her the hope that he would refuse.

"I am not so sure," he said at last doubtfully. "Have you no other plans?"

"None."

"There is an inn just beyond."

"But there are reasons why I do not wish to go to a public hotel. If you could help me in this----"

"But I can't understand----"

"Is it necessary that you should? I will pay you well for this service----"

Hochwald had struck the wrong note. Herr Markov's voice had a tone of dignity when he replied.

"I would require no pay, Father, for a mere act of Christian duty. But there are private considerations----"

"None so grave as my own need----"

"If you will tell me----"

Another long moment of silence. And then:

"I've told you that my need is great. When I also tell you that I am no priest but a fugitive from the police, you will understand. I was one of those who were at the meeting of the Socialists in the Hall in the Schwaiger Strasse----"

"You!"

"One of its leaders. In the confusion I managed to escape, and with the aid of a friend procured these robes. But I am in danger even now, and must avoid public places--which are, of course, subject to frequent inspection."

"What is your name?"

"That need not matter. If you are a Socialist--a Revolutionary Socialist, we are brothers, and I am in need of a place to rest safely."

Markov's voice fell a note as he replied:

"That puts a different color to the matter. I can help you--yes--if I know that what you tell me is true." Fra Umberto suddenly came to a halt--"How should I

know," Markov said, "that you are what you claim--that you are not a member of the secret police of the Empire?"

Tanya heard Hochwald's laugh.

"The police! Then why except for the pleasure of your company, Herr Musician, should I be wasting my time talking to you?"

"H--m! You are frank at least, holy Father. Come--a drop of rain. We must get on. At least for tonight you shall have cover--in safety."

He chirped to Fra Umberto and the machine rumbled on again. Tanya, cold with fear of the consequences of this generosity, sat trying to think what she must do. And the result of her meditations was precisely nothing. To rise and denounce him would do her cause no good. And so she did not move, deciding to wait for what was to happen, trusting that the secret of the money which she and Markov shared would keep her companion silent as to her hiding place in the vehicle.

She heard the two men talking again, a repetition of what had been said before, but Herr Markov, in spite of his acceptance of the statements of Gregory Hochwald, gave her enemy no inkling of the truth and presently the piano-organ was driven into a rough road and at last stopped. She heard Markov calling--voices in reply and then his directions to Gregory Hochwald to go into the house while he drove Fra Umberto and the hurdy-gurdy around to the stable. It was there in the dim light of a lamp that Tanya, a very pallid, frightened but beautiful Jack-in-the-Box, pushed up the lid of the machine and emerged, confronting her weary companion with the specter of his mistaken generosity.

"He! That--Hochwald!" he muttered aghast when she told him. "Fräulein, you must be mistaken."

"No, no," she whispered. "I would know his voice among a thousand. My bitterest enemy--the cause of all our troubles."

"But you did not see his face."

"I did not need to see it, Herr Markov. You must believe what I say," she insisted. "It is the truth."

He only stared at her, as at a damage he had done. She could see that he was very tired. Since early morning, with but one period of rest, he had been upon his feet and the lines of weariness in his face and at his eyes were deeply scored.

"What could I do, Fräulein," he murmured. "I did not know and you---! Herr Gott! What a situation!"

"What had you planned?" she asked more gently after a moment.

"To tell him--yonder in the house," he said guiltily, "but I did not dare until I had spoken to you."

"That is impossible, Herr Markov," she said. "We must go on."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. You shall sit and I shall walk----"

"But it is raining----"

"We must go on----"

"But what shall I tell them yonder?"

"Tell them--nothing. Let us go." She had clambered down and stood beside him. He seemed bewildered by the disaster and when she caught his hand he pressed her fingers gently but aimlessly, as though their common misfortune had robbed him of all initiative. Tanya's voice aroused him. "Come," she urged. "We must go on--further."

"There is no one that I know within ten kilometers----"

"I can walk it. Get in, Herr Markov----"

She had caught up the reins of the unfortunate Fra Umberto and was about to turn the wagon when a heavy shadow from the lamp at one side of the door moved across the stable floor.

"I came to see if I----"

The monk paused and stood staring at Tanya in a kind of awe while she dropped the reins of Fra Umberto and started back, her gaze fixed on the black cowl beneath which was a pale smudge that she knew was Gregory Hochwald's face. Herr Markov looked from the one to the other in dismay and then took a pace forward toward the girl.

"You! Tanya!----" said Hochwald, coming slowly forward. "What are you doing here?"

She seemed unable to reply. The missing mustache revealed ugly lines she had never seen. He glanced quickly at the open top of the piano-organ.

"I see. You were---- You heard? You knew that it was I."

"I heard. I beg that you will let us be on our way."

"You were going--where?"

"Further on. Herr Markov has done you a service. Do me another by remaining here."

Hochwald hesitated a moment.

"I seek to do you no harm. Nor could I if I wished. I am at your mercy as you are at mine----"

"I beg your pardon, Herr Hochwald," broke in Markov's deep voice. "The Fräulein is at no man's mercy while she is in my charge."

"A figure of speech," said the other with a smile, "but I do not like to drive the Fräulein forth into the rain. Of course rather than that, I shall go at once--or sleep here with this good donkey in the stable."

Herr Markov and Tanya exchanged quick glances which each read through the gloom. Herr Hochwald asleep within a few yards of the twenty-five millions of Nemi, hidden beneath the blankets in the bottom of the "machine of torture!" It was Tanya who first realized that short of immediate flight nothing but a change

in her uncompromising attitude toward Hochwald was possible.

"It--it does not matter. I--I do not fear you, Gregory Hochwald--not now. If you will go to the house I will follow you. Herr Markov can join us when the donkey is fed."

And with a quick glance at Markov she moved toward the door and out into the raining night. Hochwald joined her at once and together they walked toward the lights of the farm-house, leaving Markov alone to attend to the needs of Fra Umberto and hide until the morning the packages of bank notes in the straw of the stable.

Hochwald questioned and she answered frankly, telling him of the manner of her escape which was obvious enough, concealing from him only the secret of the hurdy-gurdy. As to Herr Rowland he was still there in Munich--in great danger.

There were no reproaches on her part--her injury was too deeply seated for that, his venality too surely proven. Nor did Herr Hochwald speak of the events at the Villa Montecori; but Tanya felt that since he had found her and that they must travel on for a way in company, some grounds of mutual agreement or understanding must be found which would disarm her enemy as to the precious freight in the piano-organ. And so when they reached the protection of the portico:

"This situation is none of my choosing, Herr Hochwald," she said. "We are both fugitives from a common enemy--if I denounce you, I denounce myself. But if we are both arrested it is you who will suffer the full extremity----"

"Perhaps----" he broke in quickly. "I don't minimize the danger of my position. In Germany my life hangs by a thread. It is the penalty of my zeal in the cause we both represent."

Contempt and surprise that he should have thought her so dull were what she felt, but she managed to meet his glance calmly, for she had much to gain but still more to lose.

"We need not go into that. We stand or fall together. Tonight we shall protect each other--but tomorrow--we part company."

"As you please," he said slowly. "I will do as you wish. You have suffered much because of me, Princess Samarov, and I because of you----"

"We are enemies--political--personal---- Let there be no misunderstanding."

"But you *do* misunderstand. You have misjudged me from the first----"

"Enough----"

"Will you hear me out? I will not be long. You do not believe me when I say that the money of Nemi was as safe in my hands as it would have been in yours. I mistrusted Herr Rowland--you did not. I knew that in Germany where I had power and influence, I could safely bring the money through to Russia--with you--and I should have succeeded had it not been for this cursed American who

has spoiled all my plans and betrayed me to the Wilhelmstrasse, where my future usefulness in Russia's service is now at an end."

His impudence amazed her but she smiled at him coolly. "And you imprisoned me at Starnberg, subjected me to nameless indignities, swore falsely against me in the committee----"

"To save you from yourself," he broke in. "You are a woman, unwise, impressionable----"

"Thanks. But not so unwise that I can believe in you."

"That is cruel. But what I tell you is the truth. You do not know these people as I do. Do you think that I would dare confide the keeping of the twenty-five millions of francs into the hands of an organization which can be swayed as that one is swayed by the fear of military domination? You saw what happened. One man--Von Stromberg, held their destinies in the hollow of his hand----"

He noticed the slight shrug of her shoulder.

"You may believe my motives what you choose, but I have already written to Russia asking the release of your father. I swear to you that had I succeeded in deceiving the committee as to the whereabouts of the money--had not the American found my hiding place--I should have left Starnberg before morning with you in a machine and have been by this time well upon my way to Russia."

"And I----" she broke in hotly. "They would have believed that I was the thief----"

"What would you have cared, if we had succeeded?"

"We could never have succeeded. Come, Herr Hochwald," she said with an effort at a smile. "We are wasting precious hours of sleep. Let us say no more."

She offered him her hand.

"I am very tired--so tired that I am even willing to forget everything. Tonight at least we are friends. Tomorrow----" and she turned toward the door--"tomorrow it's *sauve qui peut*--everyone for himself. You understand?"

He caught her fingers and pressed them to his lips.

"Tanya," he whispered, "forgive me----"

"I do--for tonight, Grisha Khodkine."

He looked up with a smile.

"My name--now--for all time--for Russia--and for you."

She closed her eyes as though she feared they might read conviction in the smooth tones of this new insincerity and turned away, just as Herr Markov came around from the stable and reported the donkey safely bedded down for the night, and together they went into the house where arrangements were made for Tanya's comfort. The priest was given a couch in the living room. Herr Markov against their protestations chose a bed in the straw by Fra Umberto. Tanya understood

and rewarded him by a bright glance as she went up the stairs.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PRIEST

Tanya was again called at daylight and after an excellent breakfast they were on their way, Tanya afoot, until they neared the high road when she coolly bade good-bye to Herr Hochwald and without further words entered her prison to be driven all morning steadily towards Weingarten.

"He has gone on," reported Herr Markov after a while.

"That is well. But we must not trust him," she replied, "until we are safe upon the other border of the lake."

"Will you forgive me, Fräulein?" asked Markov.

She raised the lid of her queer carriage and thrust out her hand toward him. "With all my heart, my friend," and then: "Do you think he has any idea of what we carry?"

"I don't know, but he shall not take it."

"You are armed?"

"Yes. He must keep away from us. Late tonight we will be at the Zweisler Waldhaus near Weingarten. There I am well known--among old friends--you shall see."

"Do you think there will be a message from Munich?" she questioned anxiously.

"I hope so. That we received none at Memmingen was an indication only that all is well with Herr Rowland."

"I pray that may be true," she said earnestly.

A wagon was coming along the road in front of them and so Tanya lowered the lid quickly and was silent.

Herr Hochwald did not approach them all that day. Markov reported his figure in the distance two or three times but it was not until dusk when the lights of Weingarten leaped into view before them that they came upon him suddenly at a turn in the road waiting for them.

"A long day," he muttered. "I am weary. Where do you go tonight?"

Markov halted Fra Umberto and throwing the reins over the donkey's back strode forward determinedly.

"We will come to an agreement here and now, Herr Hochwald," he said with grim politeness. "Our ways have parted--yonder. The night is fine--your robe heavy. You will sleep quite comfortably under the stars. As for us--whither we go is no concern of yours. Is it understood?"

Hochwald looked up at the tall figure for a moment, then shrugged.

"As you please. Drive on, Herr Musician."

Markov examined the man a moment in silence, and then obeyed, but as they approached Weingarten Herr Markov reported the dark figure a threatening shade in the gloom following at a distance behind them.

But they reached the Waldhaus without further incident. It was an inn, built in a much earlier day, at some distance from the high road and situated at the edge of a thick forest of well-grown pine trees. The proprietor was a compatriot of Herr Markov's, a small man with an expansive smile and a huge paunch upon which the privations of the war had made little impression. When Fra Umberto had been put into a stable and the packages of notes brought into the house and safely hidden in a room up-stairs, Tanya and Markov breathed more freely, for though nothing had been seen of the black cassock of Herr Hochwald for an hour or more, Tanya knew that he could not be far away.

When all their arrangements for the night had been completed, Markov despatched Herr Zweisler to the telegraph office for messages for Herr Liedenthal, the name that he and Rowland had agreed upon when they had arranged their code.

It was midnight before Herr Zweisler returned but he brought the message, which Markov and Tanya eagerly deciphered by the light of the kitchen lamp.

In English it would have read somewhat as follows:

"Three beds at twenty marks, seven chairs at three marks, two washstands, one bureau, forty-one marks, all used but in good condition, bought to-day Munich and will be shipped by Weingarten to Lindenhof when railway facilities permit."

Decoded, this meant: "Pursuit. Leave donkey Weingarten. Am coming Lindenhof."

The hay-cart creaked up hill and down dale all the long night. From time to time Tanya, lying comfortably in concealment, slept uneasily and in her waking moments peered out over the tail board along the gray stretch of road where she had last seen the figure of the monk, a dark blot on the velvety night. Once he had

come quite near until he walked only a few paces behind the cart, but Markov had warned him away and at last he had sullenly obeyed. For an hour or more now they had lost sight of him, but with the coming of the dawn, they saw in the distance a market cart like their own and upon its seat with the driver, the figure in black. Herr Hochwald was tireless and persistent.

The message from Rowland had been alarming. "Pursuit!" That meant immediate discovery unless they deserted Fra Umberto and the hurdy-gurdy. It meant discovery perhaps even there at the Waldhaus of the hospitable Herr Zweisler, if any agents of the police had noticed them traveling that day toward Weingarten. The rest of the message was explicit. "Leave donkey Weingarten--Am coming Lindenhof." There was nothing to do, weary as they were, but obey. And so negotiating at once with a neighbor of the inn-keeper, they had managed for a proper consideration to hire the hay-cart in which they were now approaching their destination. Beneath the hay in an old bag that Herr Zweisler had provided were the bank notes of Nemi.

No one had bothered them, at least no one but the threatening figure of the false monk, and Markov seemed fairly confident of dealing with that gentleman when the time came. The owner of their cart was a country lout, too stupid to ask questions, content with a small bundle of five-mark notes which were the excellent compensation for the use of his cart, which was to be returned in a few days.

But as the gray dawn spread over the heavens and from the high hill over which their long road wound, Tanya could see in the distance far below her the pale mist rising from the lake. She had for the first time a feeling that success was within her reach. To hire a boat to sail across to the Swiss shore seemed simplicity itself, for at Arbon or Romanshorn, she would throw herself and her possessions upon the protection of the Swiss authorities until a wire to Shestov or Barthou would bring them to identify her and reclaim the property of the Society of Nemi. But success without the safety of Philippe Rowland was not to be thought of. "Am coming Lindenhof," he had wired. But how? When? The fact of his coming through from Munich by train, covering in a few short hours the distance that she and Herr Markov had taken four weary days to travel, seemed almost unbelievable. And yet Herr Markov was hopeful. He had great confidence in the ingenuity of Herr Rowland and the message had been explicit. "Am coming Lindenhof." And since the code messages had been filed at the Haupt Bahnhof before eleven o'clock last night, Herr Rowland had planned in some way to take the night train from Munich which would reach Lindau in the early morning. The reasoning was sound--too obvious indeed to Tanya, who knew that the excellent Herr Markov could do no less than encourage her in the belief that all would go well. She knew that already Philippe had succeeded in accomplishing the impos-

sible by the very spontaneity of his daring, but to travel openly upon a train from Munich bound for the Swiss border could be nothing less in Tanya's eyes than the wildest desperation which only courted the death he had so far miraculously escaped. She feared for him now--more than ever and regretted painfully, as she had already done many times upon her journey, that she had consented to leave him in danger in Munich, while she had gone on in comparative safety with Herr Markov. And yet success seemed so near. The Swiss shore came out of the mists like a pleasant mirage of a sought for oasis to the thirsty in the desert. An hour more to Lindenhof, an hour upon the water and--safety!

But not without Philippe! As to that she was resolved. The very imminence of their meeting, the chances of failure, the danger of arrest for them all, the joyous meaning of success--all these possibilities conflicting in the turmoil of her thoughts, had tried her endurance to its limit, and her nerves were stretched to the breaking point. But the patient face of Herr Markov was her inspiration. He merely smiled at her calmly and bade her have courage, for he knew that she would still have need of it.

As they approached Lindau the market-cart in which Herr Hochwald rode, drew nearer and Tanya saw him descend and hurry forward to overtake them. Herr Markov stopped the hay-cart and got down upon the ground.

"I've warned you, Herr Hochwald," he said coolly, "that I will have no interference with the affairs of the Fräulein. We offer no impediment to your escape. Go your ways, but leave us in peace."

Hochwald smiled at Tanya who was sitting upright, listening.

"Have I not avoided you?"

"We shall do better alone. Do you go on, Herr Hochwald--or shall we?"

"With your permission we will wait a moment and discuss the matter. Just beyond the hill ahead of us is Bodolz. It is a town upon the railroad and there we will find officials, telegraph officers and soldiers from the Lindau Kaserne who keep guard."

"And what of that. My word against yours. Prison for us all----"

"Perhaps. But not if you act the part of wisdom."

"What do you want?"

"Merely to accompany you across the lake----"

"Impossible----"

"It is very little that I ask of you. Think a moment. Suppose that I should reveal the real meaning of your journey, the actual value of the truck load you haul to market----!"

Markov and Tanya exchanged helpless glances. He knew--had known all the while.

"You see," continued Hochwald easily, "we have indeed come to the part-

ing of the ways. Beyond Bodolz--safety, if I go with you. Refuse me now, Herr Markov, and you will never pass the Bahnhof."

"And when I denounce you----"

Hochwald laughed.

"I shall merely say that I am an agent of the Government who has followed you here from Munich. They may arrest me but His Excellency will forgive me much if I bring him this excellent proof of my fealty." He paused with a shrug and turned to Tanya. "If the Fräulein will deign to advise--Herr Markov is somewhat undetermined."

With a sinking heart Tanya assented, crawling back miserably under the hay. Herr Markov climbed up to his seat and they drove on, Hochwald following boldly some paces in the rear.

At Bodolz, a soldier stood in the middle of the road. And even while Herr Markov was wondering what he should say to him, Herr Hochwald strode forward toward a corporal who stood leaning against the railroad gate smoking a pipe.

"Fodder and farm produce for the abbey at Enzisweiler," he said soberly. "I came up last night."

The soldier nodded, and then inquired, "You've seen nothing of a man driving a donkey hitched to a piano organ?"

"No--nothing."

"Pass, Father."

Markov drove on, across the railroad tracks down the hill. Was there an abbey at Enzisweiler? He didn't know, but he couldn't help admiring the skill with which Herr Hochwald had guided them past a difficulty which might have proved embarrassing.

Below the hill Markov gathered new courage for familiar landmarks were all about him, and there on the border of the lake not half a mile away was their destination.

"I hope that you know where you're going, Herr Markov," said Hochwald with a laugh.

The words of Markov's reply were inaudible to Tanya, but there was a world of meaning in his tone. She lay in concealment while the cart rumbled across more railroad tracks over a rough road and finally came to a stop. At a word from Markov she emerged from her place of concealment and sat up looking around her. She was in a quadrangle or court yard paved with cobbles, the walls and buildings surrounding it in tumbled ruins. But in front of her upon the margin of the lake was a tower, once doubtless the keep of this ancient edifice, which still stood defying the tooth of time and at the present moment showed definite signs of occupancy, for upon a clothes line beside the handsome Gothic portal hung

a variety of masculine undergarments, like Schloss Kempelstein itself, in various stages of disrepair. There were fishing-nets in the sunlight on the small jetty and piles of baskets and bottles under the protection of a wooden lean-to against a broken wall. Herr Markov had told Tanya something of Herr Gratz, the eccentric owner of this domain and so she was not unprepared for his greeting.

He emerged from the Gothic doorway almost immediately, an unprepossessing creature, in soiled flannel trousers and undershirt. He had a pointed nose, small eyes deeply set under shaggy gray brows and as he strode forth from the door peering at his visitors, he seemed far from hospitable.

"And what do you want?" he began.

"Food, Ludwig," said Markov.

Herr Gratz halted suddenly at the sound of Markov's voice and stared at him, the ugly shadows in his face lifting magically.

"You, Matthias!"

"The same----"

"But Fra Umberto--and the 'instrument of torture----'"

"Sh----More of that later. For the present--the Fräulein here is weary--a long journey----"

"A Fräulein--and a Priest! Strange companions for Matthias Markov, who has so long forsworn both." He burst into laughter, a dry cackle which indicated disuse.

Herr Markov brought forth the bag from beneath the hay and followed their host into the tower, the lower floor of which served as kitchen and living room.

"If you will go upstairs, Fräulein----" said Herr Markov, "I will bring you food and coffee."

Markov, bag in hand, with the air of a familiar to the premises, already led the way. Hochwald watched him narrowly for a moment.

"Our agreement holds here, Herr Markov," he flung after him, "as well as upon the road." Markov chose to treat the remark with silence, but the millions of Nemi weighed upon him heavily. Though he was not a fighter by nature, the situation perplexed rather than intimidated him. He knew that Hochwald was quite capable of carrying out his threat to reveal their secret to the authorities, and the experience with the guard at Bodolz had convinced him that the slightest sign of trouble here at Lindenhof, the firing of shots, the sound of cries which could be heard upon the highway nearby or upon the lake would mean speedy capture. But he knew also that Herr Hochwald's other plan to reach Switzerland safely with the Fräulein and the money was the one he proposed to carry out unless Markov could prevent it. Hochwald's own safety hung on silence too. So long as they remained in Germany Markov, Tanya, and Hochwald shared a common secret and a common danger, any one of them powerless without the silence and coöperation

of the other two. A strange partnership which Markov desired to terminate at the earliest opportunity. But how? To kill, yes, but he didn't believe in killing unless in self-defense. This was not his own quarrel, but his honor demanded the protection of Fräulein Korasov. He would protect her, but the Fräulein was going to make it difficult. She would not embark until Herr Rowland appeared. Suppose that he didn't come--that something had happened! It was of this that Tanya spoke when they reached the upper floor.

"It is eight o'clock, Herr Markov," she said nervously.

"Herr Rowland is doubtless moving cautiously. Do not become alarmed."

"That man.... He frightens me. What do you propose to do?"

"Are you fit to go on?"

"Yes--but not----" She paused and searched his face anxiously. "Do you think that Herr Rowland could have failed?"

He shrugged.

"How can I tell, Fräulein," he replied softly.

CHAPTER XXIV

A NIGHT ADVENTURE

After clasping Frau Nisko warmly by the hand, Rowland left Number 16 Schwaiger Strasse and went out into the darkness of a small street at the rear of the house. The clock on the kitchen wall had told the hour of ten and he realized that he had a little more than an hour to accomplish his purpose of boarding the train for Lindau. It would be suicide to attempt without a passport the purchase of a ticket at the Haupt Bahnhof, and it was with a feeling of great uncertainty as to the result of the project that he made his way across the bridge and in the general direction of the railway station. He knew that any appearance of hesitation in his manner in the streets would lead to questions and arrest and so whistling cheerfully to keep up his courage he went his way along the Sommer Strasse as far as the Schwanthaler Museum (the very one of which he, Prof. Leo Knaus, was curator) when, the Haupt Bahnhof looming in sight, he turned to his left and followed a street which ran parallel to the railroad tracks. Having come this far he felt more encouraged for he was now in a region of breweries and factories where his rough clothes were less conspicuous than in the fashionable region through which he had just passed. He realized that he wasn't very pretty to look at, for

there was a six days' growth of beard upon his chin and the dust of the garret had completed the damage to Georg Senf's clothing, begun the other night upon the roofs.

Poor Senf! It was prison for him--and for Weiss and Benz. The hour was not ripe for mutiny in Germany--but there had been signs.... Next winter when the pinch of hunger came....

But this was no time to be thinking of misfortunes of the Munich Committeemen. Prison for a while and then conditional release, with a warning.... His own case was more desperate and required a desperate expedient--to board the eleven-thirteen train without buying a ticket. He went on until he reached the edge of the brewery district where he stopped in a small tobacconist's to buy pipe tobacco and ask questions. The man behind the counter was old and querulous, but Rowland found out what he wished to know--that he had already passed the switches of the freight yards and that the straight double track to Pasing began just here at Friedenheim. Rowland didn't wait to discuss the matter further, for a clock upon the shelf indicated that the hour of eleven was near, and so, leaving the old man staring after him, he went out abruptly and strode rapidly eastward, crossing the tracks and at last coming to a stop in the shadow of an abutment close to the rails.

A train passed going toward the city and another approached him going eastward, but it could scarcely be the time yet. So he waited and watched it pass--(a train of goods-cars)--calculating its speed and figuring on his chances of success. If the speed of the eleven thirteen was no greater than this.... But what if he missed it--or boarded a train for Berlin by mistake? He would have to take that chance. Silence except for the distant rattle of the train that had passed. He glanced around him. There was no one near, no lights, no watchmen--no police. He had chosen well. There was a cinder path beside the track--if for few seconds he could get up as much speed as the train--that was all he needed, that and a good grip on something....

Another train leaving Munich. He could see its lights and hear the rattle of its wheels as it crossed the switches. He had tried to figure the passage of the minutes since he had left the tobacconist's and was sure that the time of departure of the train he wanted had long since passed. This must be it then. He pulled his cap down firmly over his ears and peered out. The exhaust of the locomotive warned him that this was an express, slowly gathering speed, but it was do or die now. A light along the rails--Rowland stepped back in the shadows, an arm over his eyes to protect them from the glare. Then a deafening clank and roar as the engine passed, ever gathering speed. Rowland waited until one car passed--two--then darted out, running furiously and sprang for the step as it passed. A wrench at his arm-pit, a moment of doubt as he clutched at the rail, and then, he

lay along the foot board of the old fashioned car, for the moment quite safe. There was no guard in sight but he could not tell how soon one would appear--probably at Pasing, less than five minutes away, and so clutching at the nearest guard rail, he crouched and moved to the rear end of the coach. There was one dark compartment but he did not dare raise his head above the sill to look in, nor had he any intention of entering it. Indeed he had already made his plan, and moving with great caution found an iron ladder between the cars and climbed quickly to the top of the coach, along which he crawled upon hands and knees and finally lay flat with arms and legs extended, bruised and breathless but quite happy. He grinned to himself at the ease with which the thing had been accomplished, and thought of the mess he would have made of himself if he had tried to take liberties of this kind with the Empire State Express or the Manhattan Limited.

At Pasing he heard the call of the guard which reassured him that he had made no mistake. This was the Lindau train, all right, and the Bodensee but eight or ten hours away. If they did not see him--if no one looked up.... He crawled over to the side away from the lights of the platform. The travelers were all intent upon getting into their places and the guards in putting them there, so that the sprawling figure in the gloom above them only a few feet away escaped notice. But Rowland saw and heard. There was a delay of a few moments while the officials waited for a tall man who had gotten down from a machine alongside the platform. Rowland heard his rasping voice, saw the guard salute and take his valise; heard the obsequious "Excellency" of the station agent and then the door of a compartment just below him crashed to and the train moved off into the darkness. There was no mistaking Von Stromberg, and his presence was reasonable enough,--even his departure from Pasing instead of from the Haupt Bahnhof where he might have been recognized by those who could balk his plans. Rowland wondered at his own stupidity in not realizing that the Herr General would go to Lindau rather than entrust so important an affair to a subordinate. And if to Lindau why not on the only train which left for that place tonight? And here he was, the old villain, in the compartment Rowland might have entered, not ten feet from where Rowland lay. Zoya Rochal had said of Rowland that he was never so happy as when he was shooting at somebody and at this moment Rowland confessed to a strong desire to justify the statement. He crawled along the top of the carriage until he reached the ventilator which let into the compartment Von Stromberg had entered, but of course could see nothing. There was an odor of a good cigar, the rattle of a newspaper and then silence. Rowland had seen no one but von Stromberg enter the compartment and since there was no sound of other voices below him Rowland knew that the Herr General was alone.

While Rowland was planning how best to take advantage of this extraordinary situation, the train came to a stop again and he distinctly heard Von

Stromberg's voice, the caressing voice that Rowland remembered, giving some orders to the guard.

"In the second compartment of the last car," he said suavely, "you will find a very beautiful lady. You will recognize her by her hair which is as black as a raven's wing. Present my compliments and say that General von Stromberg will be honored if she will share the journey with him."

"*Zu befehl, Excellenz*," muttered the man and departed toward the rear of the train, running.

Even now, Rowland did not realize just what the message meant and until the guard returned accompanied by a slender woman in dark clothes with a small hat set rakishly upon her head, Rowland didn't know that the beautiful lady with the dark hair was Zoya Rochal. She stood for a moment in the glow of the open door, it seemed looking up directly at the shadow where Rowland was as their glances met. Then he heard Von Stromberg's voice welcoming her.

"*Ach, Madame*. This is indeed a pleasure. And I had feared that I should be forced to pass this tedious journey with no one but myself for company ... unless an evil conscience.... I pray you to enter and make yourself quite at home. The guard will bring your luggage.... So. Of course I had forgotten that you left Munich so suddenly," and then as she hesitated, his voice more insistent, "Come, Madame, if you please."

Rowland heard her climb the steps, heard the door shut behind her and then the shaken tones of her voice.

"Herr General--how did you know----?"

"Madame, do not pry behind my scenes. It spoils the effect. I know everything. It's my trade. The thing was so much more simple since there is but one train to Lindau. I was notified at Pasing the moment you entered your compartment. You do not object to the smell of tobacco? So. Perhaps you will even condescend to smoke a cigarette with me...."

The train was rumbling on into the darkness again and Rowland for the moment could hear no more. Indeed his ears were filled with one phrase and he could hear no other. "I know everything--I know everything," even the car wheels announced it, the exhaust of the locomotive as the train went up grade. If Von Stromberg was omniscient, he was surely aware of Rowland perched on the car-top just above his head, listening at the ventilator. Something of the terror that Zoya had expressed for the old man's devilish ingenuity came over Rowland at this moment. He had seen something of Von Stromberg's power of will. He wasn't frightened in the physical sense, for fear of that kind clogs the brain, the heart, the muscles,--but the fact of Zoya's presence and the old demon's knowledge of it had given Rowland a new sense of Von Stromberg's skill in divination which anticipated what it could not guess, and guessed what it could not anticipate. In

all reason Von Stromberg could have no possible means of knowing that Rowland had "jumped" the train at Friedenheim and was now crouched upon the top listening to this very interesting conversation. Back there in the Schwaiger Strasse Rowland had heard Zoya Rochal swear to the old man that he, Rowland, had escaped from Munich, but Rowland would have felt much more comfortable if Zoya hadn't come. What did her presence mean? Had she found out from Frau Nisko that Rowland had inquired as to the trains for Lindau, and, determined to repair the dreadful damage she had done, had decided to follow Tanya and Markov to the Bodensee and help them in the danger of Von Stromberg's pursuit? Or had she come seeking Rowland, trying in helping him escape to atone for her treachery? Or had her mission some less pleasant purpose?

Whatever her intentions whether good or bad, the fact of her presence alone with Von Stromberg in the railway carriage below him was in itself a threat against Rowland's security. For Zoya *knew* that he planned to be on this train or she wouldn't have come. And what might not the clever brain of the great Councilor succeed in wheedling from this woman of uncertain quality by persuasion, bribery, or threat during the long night journey that lay before them? Rowland lay flat upon the cartop, his ear near the ventilator, but could hear nothing except the low murmur of their voices. Once he heard Von Stromberg's laugh and then a little later Zoya's. They seemed to be getting on famously for with the odor of the masculine cigar came that of a Russian cigarette. Rowland did not trust her.... Beneath the smooth veneer that she had for years so carefully applied, she had shown him tonight the rough grain beneath--the Tartar grain--and he had scratched it....

Perhaps she would give him away to the old man who would have the train searched. At the next stop, Rowland had half expected it, but when nothing happened he breathed more freely. At least so far she had held her tongue. There was some good in the woman--some loyalty left--loyalty for Rowland at least that had rightfully belonged to Herr Markov, whom she had betrayed. Love--whatever it was that she had for Rowland--whatever it was ... had kept her lips sealed.

As the hours passed and nothing happened, Rowland gained confidence in his luck. Barring new treachery in Zoya Rochal, or some miraculous guess-work from his enemy below, or the searching daylight, he would come through safely to Tanya. And if he didn't get through safely to Tanya, he wouldn't be the only one who went down. It was going to be a "peach" of a "scrap" while it lasted--a "peach," and the old pelican would be one of those to keep him company in the last adventure.

But wasn't there something better than killing a lot of railroad guards (old gentlemen, with white whiskers for the most part with families of grandchildren at home) to say nothing of getting killed one's self? That wouldn't help America

much, or France, or even the Society of Nemi. What he had come into Germany for was to save Tanya from Hochwald and bring the money back into Switzerland. He was on his way; and unless some unforeseen disaster had occurred--unless Frau Nisko had failed him, the money and Tanya were already nearing Lindau. With success so near, he couldn't lose--he mustn't.

And then the train stopped at Kaufbeuren. It had been in motion for more than two hours, but the sound of voices was still to be heard in the carriage below. Rowland tried to make out what they said.

"My prisoner, Madame.... Well to submit with a good grace.... I mistrust your generosity ... broken faith.... Manage this affair alone ... pay you well if I succeed. But at Lindau ... the military prison for a few days. I will give especial instructions as to your comfort."

"Not prison, Excellency----"

"For a few days only.... I am sorry. I can't forget your help in this affair. A glass of wine--never travel without it. The ventilator? Permit me."

"Excellency, I can reach quite easily from the seat." Her voice came suddenly very near Rowland's ear. He heard her fingers on the mechanism and as he peered in through the hole in the roof a white object appeared within touch of his fingers--a tiny scrap of paper! He thrust his fingers in carefully and seized it. A message from Zoya before Von Stromberg's very eyes.... But he couldn't understand how....

He waited until the train moved on again and then brought the paper close to the ventilator to read the penciled scrawl.

"Patience," he read. "Before daylight."

That was all. But it was eloquent enough. He lay flat again, puzzled but jubilant. She had been looking for him as she came forward to Von Stromberg's compartment and had seen him crouching in the gloom above. She had guessed what he would do. That was clever of her. The old pelican wasn't the only one who could guess. Rowland suddenly had a sense of doing Zoya a great injustice, a great wrong. He had been brutal with her back there in the room in the Schwaiger Strasse, because he had thought that what she had done was beneath contempt--forgetting her wound, her weariness, and the fear she had for this sardonic old brute who even now was talking of committing her to prison. She could be no less weary now than she had been four hours ago and yet he found her planning to save him and to save those others from the results of her treachery. What was she going to do? Not murder--that would be a Boche vengeance. He couldn't consent to that. But even if he wanted to prevent, what could he do unless he came down and revealed himself and that would make an end of them both.

And so Rowland waited, his ear close to the ventilator, listening. The sounds of their voices, Zoya's laugh, the clink of glasses--was this the weak link in the old man's armor? "*Wein, weib----*" And after a while he heard no sound of any

kind. What was happening? The train was winding laboriously up through a narrow dark valley beside a mountain tarn. From time to time a red glare shot from the furnace doors of the locomotive and then a shower of cinders fell upon him. The air was chill and Rowland shivered with the cold. A glance at the East alarmed him, for the first signs of the coming dawn had appeared. It would not be long before daylight would come and with it discovery of his position by some switchman or station agent. He crouched lower clinging to the ventilator and listened again. A sound, repeated at regular intervals and growing in volume ... a snore, a man's snore. Von Stromberg slept. And then he heard Zoya's voice close at his ear.

"Philippe," it said. "He sleeps. You must come down. But wait a moment. I will see."

He waited breathless and in a moment heard her at the window of the compartment. Then her voice again.

"There is no stop for half an hour yet. You must descend."

"Where is the guard?" he asked.

"In the carriage in front. Descend by the rear and enter. The window is open."

"Good."

With a glance around, Rowland raised his head and slowly slid his body backwards until he found the iron ladder by which he had climbed and descended, waiting a moment at the corner of the car to peer out along the guards and then bending down below the line of windows swung himself along the steps to the window where Zoya was awaiting him and in a moment had tumbled in head first upon the floor beside her. In the dim light of the further corner Von Stromberg lay sprawled helpless, his head back, his mouth open, snoring stentoriously. He was not pretty to look at. But he wasn't in the least formidable. Teeth were missing. He was only senility asleep.

Rowland stared at him a moment in wonder.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"My medicine--the opiate--in his wine glass. He never knew."

"You didn't give him too much?"

"I hope not. There was nothing else to do."

Rowland caught her by the hand.

"Zoya--you're four square. It's fifty-fifty now. Forgive me."

"And you?" she questioned.

"I'm sorry. I'm a beast. We'll beat him now. But the guard----"

"He won't bother us. His Excellency gave orders that he was not to be disturbed. The guard has not dared to look in since. But we'll draw the curtain again."

They stood hand in hand and gazed at the prostrate giant.

"To think that anything like that could frighten one," said Rowland with a grin. "I think I could die happy if I tickled his nose." And then, "How did you know I was there?"

"I didn't until I saw you. I searched at Munich. It was a fearful risk for you to take."

"I had to take it. But I'll confess I didn't know what I was going to do when daylight came--unless I tumbled off. I'm not quite sure that I know now."

"The train stops at Weissenburg. We must get off there--by the opposite door and run for it."

"Are you up to it, Zoya? You've had no sleep--the excitement----"

"I'm no weakling, *mon brave*."

The daylight filtered slowly through the curtain of the carriage and still Von Stromberg slept. Twice the train stopped and each time, by way of precaution, Rowland crouched in a corner hidden under the traveling rug of His Excellency. At the second station Zoya pulled up the curtain and inquired of the guard the distance yet to be traveled. Herr Graf von Stromberg was asleep and desired on no account to be disturbed even when they reached their destination. If he still slept, the car was to remain in the station. Was this understood? She spoke in tones of authority and the man bowed and said he would repeat the orders. Madame need have no fear that they would not be obeyed.

Zoya's face was pallid and the cold light of the morning was merciless, but she smiled at Rowland and sat calmly beside their sleeping enemy, fully aware of the nature of the sacrifice she had made. Her fate was now bound up with Rowland's, his with hers. Failure now meant the extreme penalty of this man's power for them both--and his power was limitless. But a change had come over her since the scene in the room in the Schwaiger Strasse. She was very quiet, very pale, smiling when he spoke but making few comments and uttering no reproaches. She was like a soul already judged--already condemned and awaiting punishment. Rowland took her hand and held it in his. It was very cold and made no response to his pressure. It seemed that all the good in her, all the bad, all the noble, all the selfish, all indeed that was Zoya Rochal had been fused in the heat of a great emotion, then suddenly chilled with disillusion.

"Zoya," he said softly, "I'm sorry."

She smiled a little. "As you have said, it's fifty-fifty, *mon brave*. But I am no fool. I am aware of the sacrifice I make--for Her." She laughed aloud. "My sickness has made me weak. My claws are sheathed, *mon Philippe*. I shall not scratch her. I have paid--have I not?"

"Yes, Zoya--in full----"

She gave a sigh and a little shrug that seemed meant to deny it.

"It is strange. I seem to look upon you now as one who happened a long

while since. You belong to a dream of what might have been. You are very young, *mon Philippe*--also beautiful and brutal as a god----

"Oh I say, Zoya----

"I talk across a distance, Philippe--from a dream. You threw me to the floor brutally. I adored you. It was curious. Never in my life before Philippe, I swear it. Not like this. Even with this girl waiting for you yonder, I knew that I had to--I had to save you--to repair the damage and pay my debt--Fifty-fifty, as you say, *mon Philippe*."

"You've paid already----

"I have an idea that I shall pay more.... No. You do not know. In the end the woman pays for all--with interest. The balance will yet be on my side of the ledger."

"I'll square it, Zoya,--some way," he muttered.

Her fingers moved in his.

"You may square it now, *mon Philippe*," she whispered, "for all time. Kiss me.... No ... upon the brow,--a Benedictus.... *Voilà!* I am forgiven, *nicht wahr*--cleansed--the new fire burns up the old."

She rose abruptly and peered out through the slit in the curtain.

"Clean--cold--passionless--like the new day," she muttered. "It cannot be long now. You shall succeed----

"You too--we will cross the lake somehow--to freedom."

"Perhaps--at least I have done what I could, *n'est ce pas?*" She raised the hand of Von Stromberg and let it drop upon the seat. "He will do," she smiled, "but his snore is like the ride of the Valkyries. No one will dare disturb him. Have you ever been to Lindau?"

"No," he replied, "but it's on an island. Lindenhof is what we want--a village a mile to the west. Do you think you can make it?"

"Three miles from Weissenberg--Yes. I don't seem to be tired."

He looked at her anxiously. Her face was paler even than before in the cool light, but its expression was quite calm and even smiling.

A sudden grinding of the brakes of the train as it drew into a station, while the guards called out its name. Rowland, stumbling over the legs of the prostrate Von Stromberg, rushed to the left hand door, lowered the window and peered out. The train came to a stop.

"Luck! Zoya!" whispered Rowland. "A train of goods cars just opposite. We've got to start at once."

And without further words, he stepped on the seat and swung himself out of the window to the step below. Without a moment's hesitation, Zoya followed, feet first, and Rowland lowered her beside him and after closing the window of the compartment took her hand in his and together they bent forward beneath the

goods car, where they paused in a moment of danger while Rowland whispered, "I will go first. Our clothing--we must not be seen together. Follow when I pause."

And with a slight pressure of the fingers he left her, and crawled out upon the further side. There was but one person in sight--a gate woman, her back turned. Rowland walked a few steps, then paused and Zoya emerged and followed him. He turned into a country road to the southward, walking rapidly until he reached a clump of trees where he waited until Zoya came up with him, when he drew her into the security of the bushes where he bade her sit down a moment to rest while they planned which way to go.

In which direction was Lindenhof? And where Schloss Kempelstein?

CHAPTER XXV

KEMPELSTEIN

"Chère Zoya," said Rowland, in a moment as he smoked a much desired cigarette, "this will not do at all, we must never be seen together in these costumes. You look like the front cover of a fashion magazine and I--like a coal miner up for the air. But we haven't any time to lose. In ten minutes the Sleeping Beauty will roll into the Bahnhof at Lindau waiting for someone to wake him with a kiss. They'll be getting suspicious in fifteen minutes and after that they'll go over this smiling land with a fine-tooth comb. And if there are no teeth out of it, they'll draw something. There's one way."

"What, Philippe--

"A bee-line for the lake----"

"How far is it?"

"Not over a mile or so, I think. You can see the water shimmering through the trees."

"Let's go then----"

"You're not too tired?"

"No. Lead on. I'll follow."

He peered out of their place of concealment and walked in a leisurely way along the road. Behind them at the Railroad Gate the old woman still sat knitting. Both trains had gone. The way to the lake was clear, a country road, little traveled. A fresh breeze had started up and the sun had broken above the low hanging bands

of moisture and laid a pretty pattern of the shimmering foliage across his path. The business of escaping seemed absurdly simple--only a few miles of water between himself and freedom.

But the uncertainty about Tanya and Markov made him grave. Had they received his message last night and if so had they heeded it and come on safely to Lindenhof. More "ifs" came suddenly into his mind than he cared to think about. Markov was clever, and with the hurdy-gurdy could have been counted on to reach Schloss Kempelstein without difficulty. But without the hurdy-gurdy, and surrounded by police and soldiers all of whom had been notified of his passage across Bavaria, how would he fare? Was he equal to such an emergency? That was the risk. In a moment Rowland had proof of the thoroughness with which Von Stromberg had done his work, for at the next crossing two provincial policemen awaited his approach, scrutinizing him carefully.

He nodded to them cheerfully and bade them good morning, but they stood in his path and he stopped, rather alarmed at the unexpected turn of events. But he kept his easy poise admirably and his grin disarmed them.

"Your name please?" asked the older man.

"With pleasure," politely, "Leo Knaus."

"You are of the railroad?"

"Assuredly. Do I not look black enough?"

"Quite so. Where do you live?"

"In Kempten."

"Where do you go now?"

Rowland laughed.

"To the lake for a bath. You would like to do the same if you had spent the night upon my locomotive."

Here the younger man broke in, "The man described has gray hair. As you will see, that of Herr Knaus is black."

"Aye, and his skin too," laughed Rowland. And then, "You were looking for someone?"

"A tall man with gray hair and a girl whose hair is reddish brown. You did not see by chance upon the road, a hurdy-gurdy, a piano-organ on wheels, drawn by a small donkey?"

"I am a fireman. There is no time to examine the scenery. But wait----" Rowland took off his cap and scratched his head. "A hurdy-gurdy you say? With a donkey?"

"Yes--yes. You've seen----?"

"I think--I'm sure. Yesterday near Immenstadt--a donkey--a very small donkey?"

"Yes--a small donkey--and a man and woman walking----"

"At dusk last night, where the railroad and the highway ran parallel near the lake of Immenstadt. I am sure. There is no grade there and I was resting--leaning against the side of my coal-box--My engineer, Duveneck----"

"That does not matter--you are sure of what you tell?"

"Positive."

"You will report to the Weissenburg Station when you have had your bath?"

"Assuredly. My engine is there. I go on duty this afternoon."

"Good----"

At this moment Zoya Rochal came up to the group and, staring blankly, passed on.

"Reddish hair," repeated the older man.

"Of course I could not see the color of the woman's hair----"

"We will see to this at once. The telegraph, Nussbaum----"

And off they went, traveling back along the road by which Rowland had come. With a grin he watched them depart on their wild-goose chase. Immenstadt was east, Weingarten west. "And never the twain shall meet----" he quoted cheerfully to himself, aware of the fact that not yet had the net been closed around Markov and Tanya. And he, Rowland, had perhaps widened its mouth by fifty miles or so. But such expedients were dangerous and made the necessity for his disappearance and Zoya's from the immediate neighborhood a matter of great urgency. He went on toward the Lake following Zoya Rochal, compelling his feet to move slowly, while every impulse urged speed. Already the sleeping Von Stromberg must have been discovered and it would not be many minutes before the alarm would go out for Zoya Rochal. Her trim dark figure moved steadily in front of him a hundred yards away, slowly reducing the distance to the water which Rowland could now see at the foot of the lane. There were boats there, he could see them clearly now, boats of all kinds ... Zoya seemed to move more slowly--more painfully ... she was tired out. He hurried forward and passed her. "Courage," he whispered, "we are not suspected. Can you go on?" She was very pale. "Yes--yes--a little faint----"

"Courage," he repeated.

He strode on more rapidly now, passing through a village of small frame houses of the poorer sort, reaching the foot of the lane where there was a jetty, beyond which several sail-boats were anchored. There was an old man on the jetty cleaning some fish which he had taken out of a sail-boat alongside. Rowland lighted a cigarette and approached him leisurely.

"Good luck?" he asked.

The man looked up with the taciturnity of fishermen.

"Fair," he said.

"Any boats to hire?"

The man looked Rowland over from top to toe, his fish-knife suspended in the air.

"You don't think I can pay because I am a workman. I am off for a holiday, my friend. See." And Rowland exhibited a hundred mark note with an air of great pride. The fisherman became more interested at once. But shook his head.

"There is a new law about renting boats to strangers. You must have a pass from the officer commanding at Lindau."

Rowland laughed.

"Strangers! That's pretty good. And me working between Weissenburg and Kempten for ten years."

The fisherman rose and took up his bucket of fish.

"I'm sorry. Your money is as good as anyone else's, but it can't be done."

Rowland looked around him quickly. There was no one in sight upon the shore and only the slender figure of Zoya Rochal slowly approaching him along the jetty. Alongside the raft to which the man had descended to wash his fish was the sail-boat he had used. The breeze was fresh and from the South. The boom swung noisily to and fro. Rowland's mind was working rapidly.

Zoya joined him. "Courage," he whispered. "Go down."

She obeyed him, descending the wooden steps to the lower level. The fisherman looked up indifferently and rose, his fish strung.

"You're sure you don't want to change your mind?" asked Rowland pleasantly.

"No--it is *verboten*."

"Is this your boat?"

"Yes--but----"

"A hundred marks, Herr Fisherman," said Rowland bringing the money out and holding it before the man's eyes again.

The man dropped his fish and scowled at Rowland.

"*Donnerwetter!* Have I not said----?"

There was no time to waste. Rowland had put both their necks into a noose which this idiot would draw if they parleyed longer.

"Get in the sail-boat, Zoya," he said coolly and the bewildered fisherman watched her obey. "Your money----"

"My boat----" the man shouted rushing forward. But he got no further for Rowland shoved him violently, tripping him skillfully at the same time and he disappeared into the water.

Zoya was already in the boat and before the fisherman came to the surface Rowland had cast off the bow-line and pushed away from the raft. The fellow rose sputtering and tried to clamber in but found himself looking into the barrel of Rowland's automatic.

"*Herr Gott!*" the fellow muttered and dropped back into the water.

By this time the sail-boat had swung off from the dock. Rowland hauled in the sheet, pulled up the lug sail, and a quick twist of the tiller sent her on her way.

"Silly fool," said Rowland half to himself. "He's merely out a hundred marks."

The craft heeled over and the foam rushed out from under her counter, bubbling aft in a manner most cheerful to see. But before Rowland had worked clear of the other boats at anchor, he heard a sound behind him and looking over his shoulder saw the drenched figure of his friend the fisherman, rushing along the jetty shouting like a demon. Figures emerged along the shore and stood watching curiously and when the man reached them and told his story there was a good deal of running around and waving of arms, but the thing that interested Rowland most was the fact that while he looked no one ran out on the jetty or toward the row-boats. They may have disliked the taciturn fisherman as Rowland had done or they may have thought that he dreamed.

"There may be a telephone in that dump," grinned Rowland, "but I'll risk a hundred marks on it."

Meanwhile he steered for the open lake, sure that the rule against the use of petrol which applied to motor cars would also apply to power boats. For the present at least they were safe, and skimming along under a quartering breeze which showed no signs of diminishing. Zoya sat rigidly upon the hard bench, her gaze on the town of Lindau, which, separated from the mainland by a bridge, seemed to be slowly rising from the water.

"He is there," she said with a shudder. "Imagine--when he wakes!"

"Pfui! The guard! Poor devil." And then joyously, "Zoya--we've beaten them."

"Yes--the gods are good."

"Do you feel better?"

"Better--yes--but I am very tired."

"Will you lie down yonder and try to rest?"

"Yes, Philippe."

She was very submissive. He covered her with his coat and she thanked him softly. But again he noticed the air of indifference, of restraint, of passive acceptance of the new relationship between them.

The breeze was life-giving and the craft, which bore the name of *Elsa* seemed as deeply imbued as Rowland with the exigencies of the occasion, for as the breeze freshened she leaped joyously toward the distant shore as though aware of an important mission which had nothing to do with trout or felchen. Rowland steered wide of all other craft, fishermen's boats returning to Lindau, a steamer just leaving the Hafen for Rorschach, and having covered as he thought a sufficient distance from his point of departure swung in again toward the Bavarian shore.

Markov had described Schloss Kempelstein to him--a solitary tower upon the shore of the lake, west of Lindau. There was a small jetty too with boats. Such a place should not be difficult to find. He searched the shore with his gaze and found a tower--much nearer Lindau than he had supposed.

At the sudden change in the motion of the *Elsa* coming around on the other tack, Zoya Rochal started up and looked at the rapidly approaching shore.

"It seems a pity," she said quietly.

He understood her but answered cheerfully enough.

"We'll come through, Zoya, don't worry."

"It's death, this time, Philippe----"

"Well----" he laughed. "We'll go merrily. There's only one thing I regret."

"What, Philippe?"

"That I didn't tickle His Excellency under the chin."

"I hope he doesn't tickle us under ours, *mon vieux*," she said rather grimly.

The tower of Schloss Kempelstein grew in height and now the ruined walls surrounding it appeared. There was a sail-boat moored alongside the jetty and one or two smaller boats, drawn up on the shore by the tower. Rowland watched the place eagerly and the *Elsa* rushed on her bows dipping heavily into the cross seas, drenching them both with foam. Zoya leaned forward, her hands clasped over the gunwale pale, calm, indifferent to her discomfort, her wide weary gaze fixed like Rowland's on the jetty beside the tower. There was an arch which connected the tower with a ruined building alongside and it was in the shadow of this arch that they were both suddenly aware of figures moving,--two men and two women. The *Elsa* was still too far away for them to distinguish faces but the figures stood for a moment as though in conversation and then seemed to move toward the jetty. Behind the ruin upon what seemed to be a highroad, there were men on horseback, riding in a cloud of dust.

"There's something going on, Zoya," whispered Rowland tensely. "What does this mean?"

The *Elsa* was now rushing in headlong. Rowland was so eager to shorten the distance, that he had taken no account of the possible dangers of the beach or of the necessities of a safe landing, but he put the helm up now and let the craft swing down the beach a hundred yards or so while he watched the figures on the pier, now plainly distinguishable. One of the women was Tanya Korasov, the other woman--Rowland stared in astonishment. It was no woman but a monk in a belted robe and while Rowland and Zoya looked, they saw the monk direct Tanya to the sail-boat alongside the jetty. There was a shout from the men in the shadow of the arch as they rushed out toward the figure of the monk. As they emerged into the sunlight the monk raised an arm gesturing, and then there was a loud report and one of the men under the arch seemed to stumble and fall. Then

they saw him half rise and crawl on toward the monk. Another report and the crawling man sank to the ground and moved no more. The other man hesitated and then ran back to the shadow of the arch.

"Good old Markov!" shouted Rowland. "The monk is Markov, Zoya----" And then again wildly, "The boat," he shouted to the monk; "they're coming, Markov!--Behind you--from the road."

Zoya had started up at the beginning as the shots were fired and had leaned forward, her eyes peering in horror.

"That's not Markov," she whispered now to Rowland. "Not Markov," she repeated. "It was he yonder." She sank down upon the seat and buried her head in her hands.

"Not Markov," he muttered--"then who----"

An inkling of the truth came into Rowland's mind at the same moment for the man in the monk's robes turned and catching up a bag that lay beside him upon the jetty, caught Tanya by the arm, helped her abruptly into the boat and pushed off from the jetty just as the cavalcade of horsemen rode through the arch. Rowland saw them dismount and rush forward upon the jetty, but the boat had swung off and her sail had caught the breeze so that by the time the men in uniform had reached the end of the jetty there was thirty feet of clear water, quickly widening, between them. The soldiers shouted and one of them drew a revolver but the man in the monk's robes had leveled his weapon again and fired. Rowland was now near enough to see quite clearly the features of the monk. Even without a mustache, Rowland recognized the man who had done the shooting--Gregory Hochwald.

The *Elsa* was now working up close hauled under the lee of the other sail-boat which was making for the open waters of the lake. The soldier kneeled and Hochwald pushed Tanya down below the gunwale. The automatic of the soldier spoke again and again but without effect for Rowland saw Hochwald rise in his place and make a derisive gesture. The other soldiers fired also but the bullets spattered harmlessly in the water.

Herr Hochwald had been so busily engaged in making his escape that he had not been aware of the *Elsa* which had come up under his lee not a hundred meters away, but as he set his course for the open water he glanced over his shoulder at the *Elsa*, where Rowland, crouched at the tiller, was slowly overhauling him. Rowland saw him laugh and say something to Tanya who straightened, her white face gazing across the space of water at Rowland but without recognition. Zoya lay face downwards upon the seat, silent and motionless.

Rowland crouched lower, his cap pulled over his eyes. The meaning of the events upon the wharf had come to him slowly and not until he had seen Hochwald's face did he realize what this escape meant to him and to Tanya. But

having grasped the facts, he planned quickly. For the present at least their common foe was baffled and every mile that grew between the boats and the Bavarian shore was so much to the credit of them both in a defensive alliance which should not in the least cloud the personal issue between Rowland and Hochwald. There was going to be a reckoning of some sort presently when they reached the center of the lake--a reckoning which would balance all grievances. Rowland had suddenly become quite calmly exhilarated, and Zoya raised her head and looked at him in pallid astonishment. As her look questioned, he answered:

"It's Hochwald, Zoya--the priest is Hochwald." And as she straightened to look---"Keep down below the gunwale. He doesn't know, we're going to surprise him."

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh, just trail along."

He was silent again, thinking, and she questioned no more. Indeed from the look of her she was more dead than alive, and Rowland found time to wonder how she had managed to keep up for so long. He marveled at the look of sudden terror that had come into her face when Matthias Markov had fallen. It had been as though suddenly in that dreadful moment she had had a vision of the ghosts of her sins, against him ... Poor Markov....

But the memory of Tanya's frightened face in Herr Hochwald's boat soon blotted all else from Rowland's mind. Tanya there with his arch enemy Hochwald, escaping to freedom and Switzerland, with Tanya and the treasure of Nemi! What chance could have thrown them together--for nothing but chance could have aided Hochwald where such a man as Von Stromberg had failed. Chance ... Chance should not avail him now. The *Elsa* was Nemesis and she seemed to be aware of it, for she outfooted the heavy craft of Hochwald three to two. But Rowland was not ready to come up with Hochwald yet--not until they had passed the middle of the lake and were safely over the Swiss line, so he eased the *Elsa* up into the wind and let her hang there from time to time until a mile or two had been covered when he hauled his lug sail as close as he could and crossing the stern of Hochwald's boat stole up the windward where he kept the *Elsa's* sail between Hochwald and himself.

Rowland could now see that Hochwald was puzzled by the actions of this other boat which clung to him so closely and tried to come closer up into the wind, but Rowland edged away, all the while forging ahead and choosing a position which would give him the advantage when they came to terms. The wind was now blowing half a gale from the mountains to the southward and the heavy clouds which had formed above their peaks came rolling down deeper and deeper in shadow as a presage of more wind to come. But the *Elsa* was a good sea-boat and had so far shipped little but the crests of foam. Zoya lay upon the seat, leaning

on one elbow, her eyes dully watching the race. From time to time she turned and glanced at Rowland who smiled at her encouragingly but said nothing.

The German shore was now hardly distinguishable through the mist of flying spume and shadow. There was a steamer in the direction of Lindau; Rowland had marked her for the last ten minutes and she was coming fast, traveling under forced draught for from time to time her stack belched clouds of black smoke. And now, there was a deep boom which rolled with sullen reverberations across the water and at the same moment almost, a column of spray shot up into the air two hundred yards to the *Elsa's* left. Zoya started upright and glanced at Rowland who knew what this new danger meant.

"The Patrol-boat, Zoya," he said coolly. "Somebody's given our show away."

"Will they catch us?"

"I hope not. A stern chase--and we're legging it pretty fast."

"It's Von Stromberg," she said with the abstracted air of the fatalist. "One cannot get the best of the game with Von Stromberg."

"We shall," cried Rowland triumphantly. "Look, Zoya. The Swiss Patrol."

She followed the direction of his arm and saw, stealing out from the Hafen of Romanshorn, over their starboard bow, another steamer of about the same size as their pursuer.

There was no time to spare if Rowland's argument with Herr Hochwald was to be concluded before the interesting conflict of these new forces. Another distant boom and another geyser of water shot into the air, a hundred feet nearer.

"Can you sail a boat, Zoya?" he asked of her.

"No--but I'm willing to try," she said with a strange smile.

Rowland brought the *Elsa* up into the wind and held her there until the boat of Herr Hochwald drew up on even terms, then he eased up the helm and steered a course that would bring the two boats together in a few moments. He saw Hochwald, who had by this time thrown off his monk's robe, rise in the stern of the other boat and scrutinize him eagerly, his sail meanwhile flapping uncertainly. But the *Elsa* bore down on him like an avenging angel until only a few yards of water separated the two boats. By this time Hochwald who had guessed that the actions of the *Elsa* boded him no good had put his helm up to run for it. But Rowland, his cap pulled well down over his eyes, maneuvered skillfully, and brought the *Elsa* alongside, and there they rushed for a second or so, crashing together, the foam dashing over them, the white water flashing between.

"Quick, Zoya," cried Rowland. "Hold her--as she is---"

And leaving the helm he dashed forward seizing the *Elsa's* bow-line, leaped into the air landing safely and took a quick turn of the painter around the mast of Hochwald's boat.

Hochwald had recognized him now and began firing as Rowland saw Tanya

rise from the bottom of the boat where she had been lying.

"Keep down, Tanya," he cried triumphantly in the voice that she knew so well. "It's I--Philippe."

[image]

"Keep down, Tanya," he cried. "It's I--Philippe."

She obeyed him--in a fascination of surprise and terror.... Saw Zoya Rochal clamber from one boat to the other and rise.... Heard the reports of firearms ... saw Zoya's eyes widen, saw her clutch at her breast and stumbling, fall just behind Philippe who had run aft toward Hochwald, firing as he went.

Tanya hid her face in her hands for a second, then rose, watching the two men swaying in a deadly embrace. There was another shot from Hochwald's weapon, muffled against the body of Philippe, but he still struck and struggled, lifting Hochwald clear of the gunwale. As Tanya ran aft, Rowland fell half over the side, while Hochwald hung a moment, his face ghastly, feebly gripping for a hold and then disappeared in the green swirl of water astern.

Tanya caught at Rowland's shoulder and hauled him back into the boat and he sank into her arms, the smile still on his lips ... a smile that now twitched painfully ... for upon his soaking shirt above the breast was a dark spot--spreading rapidly.

"Tanya," he was muttering, "cast off--other boat--steer, Swiss Patrol----" And then his head fell forward and he was silent.

She gazed at him in anguish but laid him gently down and ran quickly forward. The boats were thrashing together dangerously and the other was half full of water. With difficulty she cast off the line ... Zoya lay upon it ... but at last she got it free and ran back to Philippe, who was lying where she had laid him, the water in the cockpit washing over him. She sat beside the tiller, raising his head in her lap, trying with her handkerchief to staunch the flow of blood from his wound. Was it to be death after all...?

"Steer--Swiss Patrol----" She caught at the sheet beside her, that Hochwald had pulled and fastened it to the cleat. A huge wave came over the bow and frightened her, but she grasped the tiller and headed toward the Swiss shore. The Swiss Patrol boat loomed larger--larger, but the other, the German boat, still came on, a white cataract at its bows.

She did not seem to care now. The rush of the waves--of the growing storm--roared in her ears, as though from a great distance. Before her out of the gray of the mist and rain came the loom of the shore. She heard the hails of men, they

seemed to be all about her, but she knew not how to obey and only sat clinging to the tiller and to Rowland, whose head was against her body very pale and still....

She was aware of a boat along side of her, manned by men in smart uniforms--one of whom leaped over into her boat, gave one quick glance around and then at first gently and then with more force released the tiller from her hand.

"If the Fräulein will permit----" a voice said.

"You are----?"

"Lieutenant Hoffmeier of the Swiss Lake Patrol----"

She raised her head, blankly staring at him and then as he caught her in his arms--suddenly relaxed.

CHAPTER XXVI

FINIS

The navy of land-locked Switzerland has always been a subject for jest among nations that go down to the sea in ships. But the patrol service of Lake Constance, which guards the line running midway down the length of the lake against illegality--the smuggling of arms and ammunition, the use of improper passports, and all the illicit dealings that are a part of the secret operations of nations at war, has been and continues to be a highly efficient force in the preservation of neutral relations.

Herr Lieutenant Hoffmeier, no lover, in spite of his name, of methods Teutonic, took as great a pride in his craft as though she had been a twenty thousand ton battleship, as much joy in his two small deck rifles as though they had been thirty-eight centimeters in caliber. It was his business to watch the lake for signs of suspicious craft and especially to note the movement of the German Government vessels at Lindau and Friedrichshafen. So that when the German Patrol emerged from Lindau, vomiting black smoke, he came out at once, assured that the two small fishing boats that he had been watching for some moments crossing in the storm were the objects of German attention. The round shots sent as warning aroused him to greater interest, especially as now it was clear that the sail-boats had reached Swiss waters. over which Herr Lieutenant Hoffmeier had dominion. He was somewhat jealous of his authority and found himself growing warm as the firing proceeded, quite in contravention of international agreements.

And so, just to show that he was on the job, and not lightly to be consid-

ered, he had his bow-gun cast loose and fired one shot well to windward of the pursuing boat. The sail-boats were now easily visible to the Herr Lieutenant with the naked eye and he noted with amazement the crashing of the two boats together, the reports of fire-arms and the fight that followed, in which one man had gone overboard. And so when he got within hailing distance, he shouted to the occupants of one sail-boat which had now swung clear, but got no answer. So he gave several quick orders and when his vessel lost way, jumped into his gig, which was swung overside, and pulled rapidly to the badly sailing lugger.

There was a girl at the helm, a very beautiful girl with reddish-brown hair, who looked at him blankly and refused to relinquish the helm. She was bewildered and terrified and after a brief question fainted in his arms. In the bottom of the boat at her feet a man lay, bleeding from a wound in his body, and forward, in the wash of the water the boat had shipped, another woman, dead.

The Herr Lieutenant took the helm and brought the lugger alongside the gangway of his craft, where with the help of his gig crew the unconscious girl, the wounded man and the dead woman were carried upon deck, his boatswain also bringing up from the lugger a black robe and a large valise which weighed heavily. Lieutenant Hoffmeier gave some brief orders--a restorative for the girl, first aid for the wounded man, who though desperately hurt, had a chance for life; then mounted his bridge and took down his megaphone, for the German patrol-boat had drawn up within a cable's length and was now lowering a boat to come aboard him.

"I would inform you, Herr Lieutenant, that you have already violated neutrality by firing over my line," he roared.

He spoke of the international boundary with the casual air of possession that was habitual with him.

"Escaping spies," came the reply, "we are within our rights."

"You have no rights in Swiss territory," he snapped, and lowered the megaphone, for his boatswain had mounted the bridge beside him and saluted.

"The lady has come to, sir, and would like to speak to you at once."

"Very good. Take the deck and receive the Herr Lieutenant. I will return."

And with a glance at the approaching boat, he went below.

Tanya was sitting up among some pillows on a bench in the cabin. She was very pale, her skin, transparent like onyx, blue-veined, her gray eyes dark and luminous.

"You wanted to see me?" asked the Lieutenant with brisk politeness.

"Yes, Herr----

"Hoffmeier----"

"Herr Hoffmeier. I plead with you that you do not give us up--I am a Russian, the wounded man an American. We claim the protection of Swiss neutrality----"

"The German captain claims that you are spies----"

"It is not true. I was taken into Germany against my will, by the man who was drowned--an agent of the German Government, with the money in the valise yonder which we have recovered."

And breathlessly, in as few words as possible, she told him her story. He listened, attentively, aware of the fact that his captive was struggling bravely against her weakness, against terror of the horrors through which she had passed. In the midst of their conversation a sailor entered, touching his cap.

"Herr Lieutenant Zapp of the Bodensee patrol and His Excellency General Graf von Stromberg----"

Tanya stared past the man toward the door of the cabin as though expecting to see the terrible old man following the messenger.

"Herr Hoffmeier----" she pleaded, "his power is without limit. It is death for me----"

Hoffmeier turned and dismissed the man.

"I will be on deck in a moment."

And then to Tanya gently, "You are no spy?"

"No, I swear it."

"Nor he--the American----"

"Nor he--that also I swear----"

He caught the hands she extended toward him and pressed them firmly.

"That's all I want to know. Fear nothing. Even the German Emperor has no dominion over me."

"You will not let them----"

"No. Be at rest."

And with a smile, he vanished through the door and went up on deck, walking straight to where the two visitors awaited him, then halting, saluted.

After formal introductions General von Stromberg smiled.

"It was most kind of you, Herr Lieutenant Hoffmeier. We are thankful for your assistance. We have come to relieve you of our prisoners."

"*Bitte?*" said Hoffmeier.

"Our prisoners," repeated Von Stromberg. "We have come for them."

"There is doubtless some misunderstanding," said the Swiss officer politely. "I have no prisoners of yours. As Herr Lieutenant Zapp will doubtless tell you----"

"Come, Herr Lieutenant," broke in Von Stromberg, "we do not wish to delay you or indeed to be delayed. Our time is short."

"And mine. I have a patient who must go to the hospital at once."

"And you have the temerity to say that you will not relinquish these prisoners to me?"

Hoffmeier bowed.

"You have not mistaken my meaning."

"And you are willing to accept the consequences of this action?"

"Beyond doubt, or I would not take it."

Von Stromberg turned to his companion.

"Herr Lieutenant Zapp,--it cannot be that this gentleman is aware of my power--my authority----"

"You are mistaken," broke in the Swiss quite coolly, "You are Herr General Graf von Stromberg, Head of the military sections of the Imperial German Secret Service, Geheimrath, Privy Councilor of his Majesty, Emperor William II." He took two steps toward the brass rail and pointed, "But your power--your authority--ends yonder--a mile away. If you are unfamiliar with the treaties--with the law which governs the Bodensee, Herr Lieutenant Zapp will doubtless enlighten you, on your way back to Lindau."

"You are impudent, sir."

"I am merely obedient to those who command me."

"Those who command you, shall command your dismissal."

"This is not Prussia, Excellency. Not while I do my duty."

Von Stromberg glared at the boy as though he would have liked to strangle him.

"Do you realize that the money which these prisoners have looted belongs to citizens of Germany?"

"That is a matter which the courts will determine," said the Swiss lightly.

Von Stromberg shrugged and laughed unpleasantly.

"You are a very foolish young man."

Then after a moment of hesitation he took a pace forward, catching Hoffmeier by the arm and walking a few paces along the deck with him, whispering.

In the midst of the conversation the Swiss suddenly flung away.

"Bribery!" he cried hotly. "You've found the wrong man, Excellency. I will give you one minute to leave my ship, or I will take you to Switzerland and intern you."

And walking to the gangway he pointed down to where the visiting boat lay, the men at their oars.

"Your boat awaits you, Herr Lieutenant Zapp. I bid you good morning, Excellency."

Von Stromberg scowled, bit his lip and scowled again, but he followed his lieutenant down the ladder and silently entered the boat, wrapping himself in his great cape and was rowed away.

Lieutenant Hoffmeier mounted to the bridge and gave the orders for full speed ahead. Then he leaned over the rail and watched the small craft approach

the German patrol-boat.

"Sacred pig of a Prussian bully. On my own quarterdeck, too! Tish!"

And he spat to leeward.

For three weeks Rowland had lain in the hospital at Rorschach, unaware of the storm that had raged about his bed. For a week he had been between life and death, for the bullet of Herr Hochwald had passed through his right lung and embedded itself between the ribs at his side. But careful nursing and the ministrations of an excellent surgeon had pulled him through, and the danger point had long since passed. Modern firearms, unless they kill outright, are not necessarily fatal, and modern surgery, almost an exact science, is on the side of strong constitutions. And so Rowland, the bullet removed, was now convalescent, sitting in a wonderful arm-chair, by a sunny window, looking out across the lake that had come so near being his grave, toward the Bavarian shore, where in the distance he could just see the dim outlines of the island of Lindau rising from the water.

Tanya had been to see him twice, Shestov once, each for a few moments only, in the presence of his nurse, and yesterday Tanya had told him that all was going well--that influence had been brought to bear at Berne by Shestov, Barthou and the Swiss Councilors of Nemi, and that the money of the Society which he had fought so hard to bring back was in the way of being restored to its rightful Trustees. Tanya was coming to visit him again this morning and he had been promised a half hour with her alone. Thus it was that the sun of the morning seemed so bright and the cloud-flecked sky so blue. Also he had shaved and was conscious of a supreme sense of well being.

She came to him, all in white (as became a bride), looking extraordinarily handsome, radiant with happiness and glowing with the joy of his recovery. The nurse, who was a discreet person, smiled at them both and withdrew.

He held out his arms and without a word she came into them, kneeling.

"Philippe," she murmured, "you are sure that you are getting well? It seems---"

"Right as rain. The cough has stopped. In a week I'll be as strong as ever. And then----"

He paused and she raised her lips to his, flushing adorably.

"And then----?"

She knew what he wanted to say, but she wanted him to say it.

"You and I--Tanya--my wife."

"Whenever you wish, Philippe Rowlan'," she murmured.

"Today?" he urged.

"Whenever you wish. We have won life together."

He was silent in a moment of soberness.

"We have a great work to do, Tanya."

"Yes. We shall do it--together. Russia!" Her voice sank. "Oh, *mon Philippe*--my country--the cause seems so hopeless--anarchy--nothing less----"

"Order will follow--reason--regeneration----"

"Honor cannot come from dishonor. Russia is false--a Judas among the nations----"

Rowland laughed. "Cheer up, my princess. Wave your wand and all will yet be well."

"My wand! A reed, Philippe--broken. I have never felt so weak--so powerless."

"But never have you been so strong--for in you I have already found new strength--new power--authority. But there must be no more mediævalism in Nemi, Tanya. I have been thinking much. I have learned something in Germany ... We must make a new fight--for the people yonder. They are not ready yet, but soon--soon. In the meanwhile we can work secretly. Our giant with a hundred arms has only been groping in the darkness. But he has a giant's strength.... He shall use it. If you and I alone against Von Stromberg--all Germany--can emerge victorious ... we can win again and again. We have given the first blow and are unharmed. There are rumors of strikes--you have heard? There will be other strikes--more blood shed--until the people of Germany arise in their might. A dream? Perhaps. But it is a good dream--for France, for England and America. But of one thing I am resolved--that the Society of Nemi shall not pass into the hands of the enemies of our allies----"

"God forbid. Hochwald----"

"Others will come--like him--from Russia--from Germany. But they shall not win--for we will know them."

"But if you are interned----?"

"They know nothing of my service in the French army. I shall not tell them. Barthou hopes for my full freedom."

"I was almost hoping----" she paused and pressed his hand gently.

"What?"

"That they would intern you. I am afraid of danger, now, Philippe. I never was before. The legend----"

"There shall be no more legends."

He laughed, kissing her hands gently.

"And yet after all was it not a legend that brought me Princess Tatyana?"

"But she is here to guard you against danger, Philippe Rowlan'. Death seems to me so much the more terrible now that Life and happiness stretch before us both.... Poor Zoya!"

"And Markov. But they went together--as he would have wished."

She hid her face in her hands.

"Together? Yes. I can never forget him.... Never."

"Nor I."

"She ... loved *you*, Philippe----" she whispered.

He was silent, thinking. And then----

"She did what she could--to atone. One is judged, I think--by one's whole life, Tanya--not a part of it. Her record is finished, but its last item is the most important. She paid ... in blood," he finished soberly.

"And Grisha Khodkine--he too----"

Rowland shrugged. "He was game----" he muttered.

She took from her hand bag some papers, much wrinkled, soiled and water-stained.

"His *dossier*----"

"We'll hardly need it now----"

He caught her hands in his and the papers fell to the floor, papers once so significant and now merely--soiled papers.

"We have now this moment, Tanya. Let us forget--everything else. Later we will give for others. Now we will take--for ourselves."

"It is too wonderful to be true----"

"Like the fairy tale. Listen and I will tell it to you. Once upon a time, there was a very small boy who lived in a very large house in a very noisy city. And there came to him in his dreams a wonderful fairy who carried a wand with a star at its end which had the property of making all good things come true. Her name was Princess Tatyana and he loved her, for she was very, very beautiful----"

Tanya laid her fingers across his lips.

"Is not our own fairy story more beautiful than this?"

He kissed her fingers and then, since her lips were near, took them too, for fairy tales, beautiful as they may be, are after all, mere creatures of dreams. And Tanya's lips were very real....

THE END

* * * * *

By George Gibbs

The Golden Bough
The Secret Witness
Paradise Garden
The Yellow Dove
The Flaming Sword
Madcap
The Silent Battle
The Maker of Opportunities
The Forbidden Way
The Bolted Door

Tony's Wife

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